

## **The Only Thing Worth Fighting For** by **obeydontstray**

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**Summary:** (Sequel to the Coffee and Contemplation and Kisses series) There are no secrets in a small town. Hopper's having a rough time, but things have a way of turning around. (Post series. Rated M for adult situations)

## 1. New

Joyce heard the shuffle in the back of the store as she walked out of the lounge and turned on her heels immediately. She'd seen Hopper and a few of his deputies enter earlier on a theft call and her mind immediately centered on him. The thief had been a young, well built young man and a few deputies had been called just in case he got rowdy. Back in the storeroom the deputies stood between Hopper and the criminal, holding Hop back as he threw punches at the younger man. Shocked at the sight, Joyce slid into the room and planted herself at Hopper's side, reaching for the big man's arms.

"Hopper! Hopper! Hop!"

He turned his fiery gaze to her and his eyes softened a bit when it registered who had been calling his name. His hands dropped to his sides and the deputies worked briskly to handcuff the criminal and escort him outside the room.

One of the deputies turned to Hopper, shocked. "I don't know what's gotten into you Chief, but maybe you need to take the rest of the day off."

The room cleared save for Joyce and Hopper and she turned to him, placing her hands on his chest.

"What the hell was that about, Hop?"

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He huffed and leaned against the wall, sliding down it until he sat in a hunched position. "That kid was mouthing off at me."

She sat next to him, her legs crossed indian style. His eyes still burned with something, his features tense.

"I just don't have much patience for that shit today."

She took his big hand in both of hers when it dawned on her what day it was. There are no secrets in a small town. Today is the anniversary of Sarah's death. While she searched for something to

say, he fished around in his pocket for a moment and retrieved a medicine bottle, shaking out a few of the contents. Joyce stopped his hand before he could put the pills in his mouth.

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They both jumped when the door to the store room opened and Joyce sprung to her feet, turning to face her boss. He stared down at Hopper's sad face and took Joyce by the shoulder.

"Take him home, will ya?" No secrets in a small town. "Take the rest of the day off and make sure he doesn't get in too much trouble."

Joyce tried to ignore the stares as she walked through the store with Hopper lumbering along behind her. She'd heard the whispers since things had returned back to normal. She knows everyone thinks she's another notch in Hopper's belt. The whole town knows how much time he spends at her house these days. What they don't know is how much time he's spent with her boys and helping repair the house.

When she glances back to see if he's still behind her, the shattered, far away expression on his face pulls at her heart. Outside she places her last cigarette between her lips and when she notices him watching her, she passes it to him. He bends slightly as she sparks the lighter, his fingers ghosting over hers to protect the flame from the wind and sending an electric current feeling under her skin. He inhales deeply as she unlocks the doors and exhales a thick cloud of smoke, sighing heavily as he does so.

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Inside the car he passes the cigarette back to her and her mind flashes back to them sharing a stolen cigarette together under the bleachers in high school. He retrieves a flask from somewhere on his person and takes a swig. When she eyes him he shrugs. "Whatcha gonna do, arrest me?" He quips, the ghost of a smile forming on his lips. "I'd share, but you're driving."

She shakes her head at him. "You know all of that doesn't change anything, right Hop? The pills, the booze, none of it's going to fix it."

He stole the cigarette from her and took another deep drag. "No, but it dulls the pain." He admits bluntly and it makes Joyce's heart ache for him. "On days like this...there's just no way around it."

He protests lightly when he realizes she's not driving to his house.

"You shouldn't be alone today."

"Joyce, I get mean on days like this. Lonesome. You and the boys, you won't want to be around me."

She steals a glance over at him. "You don't scare me, Hop." And she meant it. A marriage to Lonnie Byers and losing a child to the Upside Down had taught her how well she could handle things.

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At home Joyce called out into her quiet home, calling for the boys. Panic rose in her temporarily until she discovered the note on the kitchen table. Jonathan's handwriting explained that both boys were visiting the Wheeler's again. Jonathan to study with Nancy, Will for another D&D campaign with the boys. Joyce sighed, bracing her weight on the kitchen counter. She hoped that the boys would be home to help her distract Hopper. He always seemed happier after interacting with her boys. "Make yourself at home." She called over her shoulder to him. "I'll cook dinner." She heard the tv click to life and she busied herself with finding something quick to cook.

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Later she stuck her head in the living room.

"Hey Hop-"

He lay stretched across her couch, bare feet crossed over the arm of the chair and an arm beneath his head, sleeping soundly. His flask lay empty and on it's side on her coffee table. She stood still momentarily, looking over his calm features and debating on whether she should wake him.

"Hey Hopper." She touched his shoulder and he stirred.

"Sarah..?"

"Hop. Dinner's ready." He opened his blue eyes slowly, taking a moment before he remembered where he was.

"Come eat." The tv talked in the background as he set upright and she turned for the kitchen. "Joyce."

When she turned back to him he wrapped his arms around her hips, pulling her body close to his. His shoulders shook under her hands as he pressed the side of his face to her stomach, sending another electric charge all the way to her toes. She ran her fingers through his hair as he silently shook against her, his tears wetting the front of her work shirt. Dinner grew cold as her mind fumbled through an array of things that she could say but in the end nothing was going to fix this. There's no getting around it. Only through it.

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After a while he released her and wordlessly stood, wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his uniform. She hugged him around the middle in return, looking up into his red rimmed eyes before taking him by the hand and leading him into the kitchen. She heated his plate of spaghetti in the microwave first after passing him a cold beer.

"Thank you." He said softly when she placed the food down in front of him. She knew he really wasn't referring to the food and she nodded, retrieving her plate and sitting opposite of him at the table.

"After we eat, if you'll give me your uniform I'll wash it. I've got some of Lonnie's old clothes that might fit you." She informed him and he nodded solemnly. She noticed he still carried that broken, far away look in his eyes and her heart ached for him.

After dinner he left the room and she heard the shower start. She moved to her bedroom and retrieved a pair of Lonnie's blue plaid sleep pants and a grey tank top. Refolding them, she placed them on the foot of her bed before busying herself with changing out of her work clothes and washing the dinner dishes. Jonathan called, letting her know that the boys would be staying the night. After a while she heard the shower turn off and she turned to find Hopper standing in

the bathroom doorway, a towel tied around his waist. Steam rose off of his reddened skin and a cigarette hung limply from the corner of his lips, his hair a disheveled mess.

"Cl-clothes are on the foot of my bed." She stammered, quickly turning her attention from him. As he dressed alone in her room she gathered his dirty clothes with her own and threw them in the wash before taking a seat on the couch, flipping through the channels until she landed on a rerun of Gunsmoke.

He joined her in the living room later and she had to hold back a laugh. He stood in front of her bare chested with Lonnie's pants ending a full two inches above his ankles. "Shirt wouldn't fit, I'm a bit bigger than him." He explained, shrugging. She grinned at him and gestured for him to sit down beside her.

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She pretended not to notice when he stretched his arm across the back of the couch, around her shoulders. And he pretended not to notice when she leaned against his bare chest, her cool hand against his warm skin.

Eventually she ended up lying between his legs, her chest against his and her arms wrapped around his waist as he lay under her and they watched the tv together intently. It felt so nice to be this close to someone after so long. She rarely had this with Lonnie and the kids were seldom affectionate with her anymore.

They lay together in silence until Hop checked his watch. "It's getting late, I should head home." She could hear the steady thump thump of his heart under her ear and she nuzzled her head against it, tightening her grip around his torso. He felt it and placed a kiss on top of her head.

"You don't have to go."

"But the boys..."

"They're spending the night at the Wheeler's. You know, they actually got Jonathan into that Dungeons and Dragons now." He smiled,

imagining Jonathan huddled with the smaller boys around a table in the Wheeler's basement.

He caressed her cheek, looking into her eyes.

Joyce I..."

He moved to say something but quickly changed his mind. Instead he leaned forward, capturing her lips with his in a sloppy, clumsy sort of way. He tastes of alcohol and cigarette smoke.

She pulled him closer and kissed him again, this time slower and more gently. He pulls her further up his body, drawing her legs around his waist as the kiss deepened. His hands are all over, under her t-shirt and the hem of her shorts, feeling every stretch of skin he can access. He kisses across her jaw, to the hollow below her ear, and to her throat.

"I love you." He can feel the vibration of the statement at the hollow of her throat where his lips linger, his fingers tangling in her hair.

He kissed his way back to her ear, whispering "I love you too."

## 2. Promise

A/N: Thanks for the sweet review jrael1948! This chapter is just for you! Hopper is my favorite character too! I hope I'm not making him too much of a softy in this. I just ship him and Joyce so hard. Those two really really need each other. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this :)

"Joyce." He mumbled sleepily.

She opened her eyes to glance at her bedside clock. Six am.

"I hate to disturb you baby, but we left my truck at the store." He stretched heartily beneath her and she tightened her grip on him, placing a sleepy kiss on the center of his chest. They both knew their busy night of sex and sleep had to end sometime.

"Can't we stay like this?" She whined, lightly scratching his side with her nails.

"I'd love to." He replied, loving the sensation. "I think I have one more round in me. But I've gotta go to work." He teased and she smiled in response, reaching up to kiss him.

"I love you, Joyce."

"Even when you're sober?" She teased and a hurt look flashed across his features.

"I mean it. I don't just say those words lightly. I love you." She placed a kiss on his bearded cheek before nuzzling into his neck.

"I know, I love you, too."

He slid from beneath her and she reached for his hand, holding it until he pulled away from her to step into the old sleep pants he'd worn the night before. "Your uniform's in the dryer. I didn't have time to fold it last night." She mentioned and he winked at her.

"I'll be in the shower."

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Hop stretched his arms outside her door, his mouth open in a yawn when he nearly ran into the smaller man in the hall.

"J-Jonathan?" He stammered, surprised to see Joyce's eldest home so early. "Jonathan listen, it's not what it looks like." He said, in a panic for some sort of explanation.

The younger man looked from Hop's face to his mother's door. "I've heard things around town. Listen, just don't hurt her, okay?" He said, glancing down at the camera in his hand. "If you hurt her I swear to God-

Hop threw his hands up in a defensive gesture. "She's been through too much. I'd never put her through anything like that. This has all happened kinda sudden but you know- I care about her. A lot." Jonathan nodded, stepping around Hop and headed to the kitchen.

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He met her out at the car, squinting at her in the morning sunlight. In the car he took her by the hand, kissing the back of it.

"Thanks. For yesterday. I was a wreck." He commented and she squeezed his hand in the seat between them as she backed out of her driveway.

"Jonathan knows now." He said, breaking the silence that had grown between them since that last statement. She turned to him in surprise. "I ran into him in the hall. I guess he came home for his camera. He took it a bit better than I thought he would."

Her lips drew into a tight line. "Lonnie really did a number on the boys. All of us really."

He threaded his fingers between hers, his thumb lightly tracing the bones beneath her skin. "Lonnie's the past. I'm here now. He's a grade A dick."

She laughed at him and he kissed the back of her hand again. "I wonder what Will will think about us?" She asked.

"He's probably heard the gossip too. We're the talk of the town." No

secrets in a small town. With his free hand he dangled a cigarette from his lip, flicking the lighter to life and taking a puff when he lit it.

"You should come to dinner tonight." She remarked, turning into the parking lot of the grocery store.

"I will." He replied as she pulled into the parking spot near his truck.

She leaned across the car and retrieved the cigarette from between his lips, pushing his hat back on his head so she could kiss him goodbye. "See you after work." He mumbled against her lips before taking his cigarette back from her and sat back in his seat momentarily, staring at her face.

"What?" She demanded, a slight blush spreading across her face under his gaze.

"Just feel lucky. That's all." He grinned before stepping from the tiny car and opening his truck door.

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At work he walked through the office, coffee in hand.

"You look happy today Chief. Get lucky last night?" One of the boys joked and he smiled to himself as he grabbed a doughnut from the box on the counter. If they only knew.

"Yeah, tell your Mom I said thanks for the good time." He fired back, grinning.

He propped his feet on his desk in his office, looking over the files on his desk. Barb's file sat at the corner and he frowned. He was still working out how to close that one. How do you explain that loss in police terms? He still remembered her face and grimaced to himself. He brought Will home. But there'd been no hope for poor Barb. A note lay under the file. From Brenner's crew. Seems he had other work to do today.

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By eleven that night Hop still hadn't show up. Joyce paced the floor of the kitchen, a cigarette held nervously between her lips. Jonathan sat at the table, fingers laced and his head against them.

"Something must have happened. What if he's hurt?" She fretted, tears welling up in her eyes.

"Or he's wasted somewhere. Probably passed out on his couch at home."

She turned to her son with a fierce look burning in her eyes. "No. Not after-"

"Not after you've slept with him?" She stopped her pacing suddenly turning back to face him.

"Not after everything we went through together to bring Will home. After everything. He's part of this family, Jonathan." At the sound of a truck outside she leapt for the door and flung it open to find Hopper, his fist raised to knock.

"Hop-" He fell into her arms, his face and hands a bloody mess. She guided him to the couch and he fell upon it heavily. She sat down beside him, pulling his bloody hands into her lap.

"What happened?" He shook his head vigorously, pointing upwards at the ceiling, a mannerism she'd learned that he used as a reminder to her that their homes were forever bugged since they brought Will home. Jonathan glared at him on his way to his room.

She pushed him to sit on the side of the bathtub as she fished around in the medicine cabinet for something to patch him up with. She knew not to ask him anymore questions. He'd paid some sort of price to bring Will home, made some kind of deal he couldn't tell her about. Guilt weighed on her heavily as she dabbed at his bloody knuckles with an alcohol soaked washrag. He hissed in pain but mostly stayed silent until he looked up into her eyes.

"I'm sorry I missed dinner. I got tied up at work." She nodded and kissed his forehead. She sat on the toilet lid and looked up into his handsome face, dabbing alcohol at his split lip.

"Someone did a number on you today." She remarked, noticing the swelling in his left eye.

"You should see the other guy." He responded with a half grin, wincing when he moved his lips. When she finished doctoring him up he moved to the kitchen, grabbing a beer from the fridge and sticking the cold can to his eye.

"Why don't you eat somethin-" He shook his head no at the statement.

"I'm not hungry. Just bone-tired."

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She grabbed him by the hand and lead him into the bedroom, shutting the door behind them. Methodically she began unbuttoning his flannel shirt and sliding it from his shoulders, stopping to kiss the center of his chest. She moved to unbutton his jeans and he stopped her, reaching in his pocket for something. In the safety of her bedroom, he pulled his class ring from his pocket and handed it to her.

"I wanted to give you this back in senior year, but life got in my way." He said with a half smile and she smiled back, standing on her tip toes to kiss his lips. They both laughed when she tried it on and it hung loosely from her finger, way too big for her dainty fingers. He produced a leather cord from his pocket too and took the ring from her, fashioning it into a necklace before sliding it over her head.

"I figured that would happen." She moved her arms around his waist, resting her head against his chest and listening to his heartbeat.

"I want you to move in, Jim. I want you to come home to me every night."

### 3. Playing House

A/N: jrae1948: You're quite welcome, your reviews make my day ^\_^ this one's pretty fun to write so I'll keep it going for ya :)

Hopper had a nice shiner in the morning light. He winced when Joyce touched the side of his face, fussing over the swelling. "You shouldn't have socked me in the face, then." He teased, a half smile across his face. He flexed his fingers over the hem of the comforter, working out some of the soreness that had settled in his knuckles during the night. His lips were bruised, purple in the morning light.

"Hop..." Her thumb grazed over the split in his lip, concerned welling up in her eyes.

"It looks worse than it is. Really." He sat up and leaned across the bed, pressing his lips to hers for a good morning kiss.

"You've gotta learn to talk other than with your fists, Hop." He chuckled, swinging his legs from under the covers.

"Sometimes there's no other option."

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The tv talked from the living room as she cooked breakfast. She caught snatches of a conversation about a government official being assaulted by an unknown assailant. Curious, she stepped around the corner to look at the tv. A portly man in a ill fitting suit stood at a podium, both his eyes blackened. The man described his attacker to the crowd around him. A vague description of a tall man wearing a hat. He'd been attacked in the dark.

"Whatcha watching, baby?" Jim asked as he rounded the corner, pinning his badge to his shirt.

"I don't know. Nothing important." She remarked as she switched the tv off and headed back to the kitchen. Will and Jonathan shot him odd looks as they took their places at the table.

"Work." He commented, hoping that would be enough of an

explanation. Will went back to drawing, his mouth set into a determined line like an expression that Joyce would make. Jonathan watched Hopper with a determined eye.

"Did you win at least?"

"Of course!" Jim commented.

Joyce twisted a clean dishtowel around a handful of ice cubes and pressed them to his eye before he reached up and took hold of the makeshift ice pack on his own. She ruffled Will's hair as she walked past. Jonathan turned his attention to the schoolbook in front of him again, his finger tracing the line he was reading.

"Got a test today?" Jim asked, genuinely curious.

"Biology."

"I never was any good at biology." Jim confessed. "At least not book biology."

Joyce shot him a dirty look over the kitchen counter and he grinned broadly, immediately paying for it with a wince when a jolt of pain shot across his bottom lip. He licked it absentmindedly.

"You'll do great. I've seen you studying a lot."

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Both boys bid the adults goodbye after breakfast, each hefting heavy backpacks to the door in a hurry to get to school. Joyce shook her head at Jim, her chin braced in her hand and her elbow on the table, a cigarette perched between her index and middle finger.

"What?" He asked and she smiled, pausing to take a draw.

"Please be safer at work today?" She cupped his cheek and he nodded against it, turning his lips to press a kiss into her palm.

"Have a good day at work." He mumbled against it.

"Just like every other day." They sat in silence for a beat, smoking

their cigarettes before he cleared his throat.

"I was thinking about stopping at my trailer and picking up a few things. If you're still sure about this."

"I still want you here every night, Hopper."

"Jim." He corrected her. "You don't have to be so formal anymore, Byers." He teased, leaning forward in his chair to capture her lips with his again.

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"Damn Chief!" The boys exclaimed at work.

"Bar fight." He exclaimed, pulling his hat lower over his eyebrows.

He kicked back at his desk, his feet propped up and a doughnut in his mouth. A mug of coffee sat steaming on his desk, untouched as of yet.

"Jim." Flo stood in the doorway, an ice pack in her hands.

"I'm a lucky guy to have so many women fussing over me today." He mumbled before he swallowed his first bite of the pastry. She knew about Joyce. Hell, she knew they'd end up together before Joyce and Jim even did. "She's already had the ice pack to my face this morning."

She offered the pack to him anyway. "Wouldn't hurt to ice it again." Flo had babysat him as a youngster and she never let him forget it. All these years later, as her boss no less, and she was still looking out for him. He took the pack from her gently and obediently held it to his eye.

"Thank you, Flo."

Patsy Cline sang about 'Three Cigarettes' over the radio in the corner of the room and he absentmindedly lit another one, letting the smoke curl around his bruised face.

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After work he took a ride home. Former home. Never was home. He packed up what clothes he deemed decent enough to bother with moving. His extra uniforms, the few shirts, underwear, and jeans he owned. Socks. A couple of beat up pairs of shoes. He packed with them, with much care, the crayon drawing from beside the door. From there, he didn't care about much. A few toiletry items. Standing in the bathroom he took one last blue pill before tipping bottle and spilling its contents into the toilet. With a flush he vowed to never be dependent on them again. He packed his radio and the few records he'd kept over the years. He loaded what was left of a few bottles of whiskey and the few cans of beer left in his fridge into a bag with half a carton of cigs. He folded the afghan blanket his mother had made him and tossed it on top of the box. One box. And one bag of vices. His whole life as a single man in one box. The thought rubbed him the wrong way as he loaded the box and the bag in his backseat.

When he got back to Joyce's, back home, the whole house was quiet save for music playing in the back room. He realized it was coming from Jonathan's room and he sighed. Things between him and the young man had been a bit awkward, to say the least. He wondered what he'd say to him one on one. He shoved his box and bag into a corner of Joyce's room, save for the drawing that he placed on the dresser under his hat. He changed into a pair of jeans and a henley and within minutes he was sound asleep, spread eagle on his stomach in Joyce's bed. Their bed. He dreamed of faceless monsters and that one brave little girl with the shaved head. In his sleep he reached out for her but couldn't quite grasp her hand.

Joyce woke him when she kissed his temple and he squinted at her in the darkness.

"Dinner's ready."

He nodded and grasped her hand, squeezing it before letting it go.

"I unpacked your things." She mentioned. "Second drawer is yours." He nodded and sat up, holding his head in his hands. He glanced at the whiskey bottles on the dresser and on the big mirror above it was taped the crayon drawing of Sarah's. He moved to thank Joyce but she had already stepped out of the room.



He took his seat at the table. Lonnie's old seat. A fact he'd learned from Will in passing. He thought briefly of Lonnie and how much the poor bastard was missing out on, just to be with some teenager. When Joyce sat his plate in front of him he grabbed her gently by the wrists, pulling her close for a kiss.

"What was that for?" She asked and he grinned at her.

"Just because I can."

When the boys joined them he cleared his throat. "Do you guys like Indiana Jones?" Will nodded his head vigorously. Jonathan nodded too. "Temple of Doom comes out tonight. Wanna go after dinner?" He asked, mostly to Joyce but to the boys as well. The boys both replied with excitement and Joyce nodded.

An hour later Jim glanced in his review mirror at the boys as they discussed with each other what happened in the first Indiana Jones movie. In the back of his mind he thought of just how close they'd come to losing Will and it pulled at his heartstrings briefly. Joyce reached across the seat for his hand, squeezing it tightly.

"Good idea. The boys have been dying to see this movie."

"Me too." He replied, thinking of watching the first one. In the city. Alone. The day his divorce became final. Afterwards he'd returned to his hotel room and drank himself into a stupor, making plans to move back to Hawkins. Funny what a difference a few years could make. He wondered briefly if Lonnie had bothered taking the boys to see the first one in the theater. He stole glances at Joyce across the cab.

"What?" She asked, catching him once.

"You look nice, babe." He complimented and a light blush spread across her face. He wondered how many opportunities Lonnie missed on telling her so.

In the ticket line Dustin, Mike, and Lucas found them. Will had radioed them before he left home, it seems.

"Just like the Brady Bunch." Jim whispered to Joyce as they looked over the group of boys. Friends and neighbors talked to the couple as they waited in the long line and the boys talked amongst themselves. Something about a dungeon campaign and monsters. Jim figured he'd be the talk of the town again tomorrow between his bruised face and his first very public date with Joyce and the family. His new family. The thought made him pull her closer.

In the theater Jim took her by the hand, leading her to the corner of the back row. The boys opted to sit together a few seats ahead of them. The boys shared a few bags of candy between them and slurped on their drinks, Jonathan sat with his feet propped up on the empty seat in front of him.

"You know you look a little like Indy, with that hat." Joyce joked and Jim nodded, pulling his hat down lower over his eyebrows.

"I thought so, too." He teased and she smiled, curling against his side under his arm and stealing popcorn from the bucket he held.

"Are you sure you don't want some?" She asked, offering him her bag of M&Ms. He pressed a kiss to her temple.

"Nah, you're all the sweets I need."

"Aren't you the flirt tonight?" She smiled.

"This is sorta kinda our first official date." He observed. "And besides, it's my job to make you smile."

Will had another of his coughing spells, doubled over in his seat momentarily. Joyce sprung to life, headed towards Will's seat. Jim frowned, wondering for the hundredth time if it had anything to do with his time in that...other place. Jim reached for her hand, keeping her back.

"Joyce, he's okay." Hopper assured her, taking her fretting hands into his. Will was okay when the previews started and the theater began filling up with people. "He's just a kid. They bounce back. It just takes a bit of time." She nods and buries herself back into his side and he wraps his arm around her.

Jim tossed a piece of popcorn into the air, catching it in his mouth.

"Never seen anyone do that on the first try." She observed and he grinned broadly. He tossed another piece and it ended up bouncing off of his chin. She made an amused noise and he tossed a piece at her. It bounced off her nose and they both laughed. He stole a swig of the giant rootbeer he'd bought for them to share and offered her some. The movie finally started and they both settled down while Joyce stole a handful of popcorn. Jim noticed movement over her head and he glanced past her momentarily to see something he wish he hadn't. Lonnie and his newest blonde bimbo took seats on their row, several seats down. When he sighed Joyce turned her gaze to him.

"What?"

"Nothin, sweetheart." He replied, placing a kiss on top of her head. Lonnie noticed them about that time and Jim shot the smaller man an evil look and pulled Joyce closer to him.

As Jim watched the movie he kept noticing in the the corner of his eye that the shithead kept glancing over at Joyce. His Joyce. So Jim decided to give him something to look at. His mouth sought hers in the dark and she moaned against him.

"Jim..."

"First date remember?" He whispered to her with a grin, capturing her lips again with his own. Her hands found her way to his shoulders as he deepened the kiss, moving in his seat so he was facing her, and in Lonnie's direction.

During a particularly quiet part of the movie he nibbled on her earlobe, making her giggle and immediately cover her mouth in embarrassment. A blush covered her cheeks and he moved her hands from her face, spending his time kissing the redness away, his lips skimming across her cheeks.

"You're so damn cute." He whispered to her in the darkness. With her

thumb she rubbed across the healing split in his lip. She kissed him sweetly, holding his stubbled cheek in her hand.

He moved their drink from between them to the cupholder behind him, raising the arm of the chair between them and pulling her closer.

"Jim!" She protested in a whisper.

"No one's paying any attention to us." He lied with a smug grin across his face as he moved to kiss her again.

They missed about half of the movie but Joyce's lips were kiss darkened and Jim was damn proud of himself. Occasionally he'd look up and straight into Lonnie's eyes and grin between kisses. Joyce was damn good at this and his mind flashed back to when they'd make out under the bleachers during their high school football games.

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When the credits began to roll the pair sat upright in their seats, moving to straighten clothes and appearances. Jim shifted uncomfortably in his seat, trying his hardest to think of math equations and any snatch of history he learned back in school. Any of the rules and regulations he'd learned in academy. Anything but how he could see in her eyes just how eager she was to get home too. His fingers lingered at the hem of her skirt, at the warm flesh of her thighs.

"We'll pick this up back at home." He whispered and she grinned, reaching up to steal one last kiss from him. He glanced over her and noticed that Lonnie and his date had already left.

The boys spilled out of the theater before them, all trying to out talk each other about what their favorite part was and who amongst them was Indy.

"I'm Indy, obviously." Hopper joked to them. "I have the hat."

The smaller boys decided they should all spend the night at Dustin's and when Will turned to Joyce she nodded before he could even ask. It was Friday night after all.

"Hopper!" Came an angry voice from behind them in the parking lot.

He barely missed the swing and he let go of Joyce's hand, stepping away from the group.

Lonnie swung at him again and Hopper caught him by the shoulder, forcing the smaller man down on the hood of his Blazer.

"Don't get to comfy Hopper! Those are my kids." He mumbled against the hood.

The group stood in a semi circle around the scene. Jonathan stood with his arm around his mother's shoulders.

"Joyce still loves me."

She scoffed from where she stood, her hands on her hips.

"Look-" Jim growled, his mouth mere inches from Lonnie's face. "You may have traded her in for two twenty somethings, but she's upgraded. She's mine."

"You're no better than me, Hopper!" He grumbled, trying to move.

"I'm trying. I may be just a big of a mess as you, Lonnie Byers, but I'm trying. That counts for something." He replied, shoving Lonnie's face further into the paint. "And those boys never were yours. You don't give two shits about them until you feel threatened. Now I suggest you calm down. Don't make me kick your ass in front of my family."

When he let go Lonnie lunged for him and he connected with a right hook, dropping the younger man in an instant. "Carry your ass home." He scoffed as he rounded the truck, opening the door for Joyce. "Before I arrest you for assaulting a police officer."

Jonathan glared at his father as he rounded the truck too, taking his seat in the back.

"Show's over folks. Go home." Hopper commented to the onlookers that had gathered around.

"You kids be safe going home." He told the smaller boys as Will climbed on the back of Dustin's bicycle.

"Yes Sir." They sounded in unison.

"Hey Chief-" Will called to him. "You are Indy." Jim grinned as he climbed into the driver's seat and tipped his hat to him.

Lonnie found his feet, glaring at Jim as he rubbed his jaw. His date grabbed him by the hand and lead him away before he caused any more trouble.

Joyce leaned across the seat and gave Hopper a kiss. "Thank you." She'd never know he'd riled Lonnie up to start with. "You're a good man, Jim."

## 4. Changes

A/N: jrae1948 thanks for the review sweetie ^^

Joyce sat at the kitchen table, her head in her hands and a cigarette burning away unattended in the ashtray in front of her. She was so quiet that Jim barely noticed her sitting there as he passed by.

"Hey babe-" He took the seat next to her at the table and put an arm around her shoulders. "What's wrong?"

Without reply she buried her face in his shirt, her hands fisted in the khaki material. He held her close as she cried, placing small kisses in her dark hair.

"What in the world?" Her arms hung loosely at his sides now, grasping at his hips. "Baby, what's wrong?" When she looked up at him he brushed her tears away with his thumbs and kissed her forehead.

"I've had the worst day." She replied, burying her face in his shirt again. "The washing machine broke. I dented my car at work. Lost my keys in the storm drain after work and had to call Jonathan to bring me the spare set. A wasp got in the house and kept me out of the bedroom for four hours. Four hours!"

He chuckled lightly and lifted her chin. "I'm sorry sweetheart. I would have saved you from the wasp if I hadn't been at work."

"I know it all sounds silly, but it'd just been the worst day. I can't do anything right. I can't wait for it to be over."

He brushed her hair from her face and kissed her. "Why don't I take you out for dinner? Just the two of us? We can try and make this day a little better?"

She sniffled and nodded, picking up her neglected cigarette and knocking off the cherry into the ashtray.

"Why don't you take a long hot bath and let me look at the washer? Take your time and get dolled up. I'll take you to Angelo's." He

offered, referring to the fanciest restaurant the tiny town of Hawkins had to offer. She sniffled and nodded again.

.

Outside the house he stopped to look at Joyce's car. She managed to dent in the driver's side quarter panel. He popped the hood and leaned over the engine, peering down inside the car. With one swift movement he popped the metal back into place with his fist. Some things can be fixed with a fist. Scratch one thing off the bad day list. He didn't have to look at the washer much to realize it was fried beyond repair. He sat at the kitchen table with phone in hand, ordering a new one. He'd ask Jonathan to go with him to pick up the new one tomorrow. Wasn't much he could do about her lost keys but make duplicates tomorrow when he went into town for the washer. He sighed and walked into their room, picking out his blue dress shirt to wear with a pair of clean jeans.

He was buttoning up his shirt, his tie loose around his shoulders, when she walked into the room. The short black dress she wore made his breath catch.

"What?" She asked when she caught him staring as she pulled on a pair of black heels.

"You look beautiful, babe." She looked bashful momentarily and it made him smile. He stood behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, placing a kiss on her bare shoulder.

"You're going to have to get used to compliments. Cause I mean them. You're beautiful Joyce." She turned to his chest and moved the tie around his neck, skillfully knotting it. Then her lips moved to his.

"I love you, Jim."

"I love you too." He replied, reaching down to take her hand.

.

At dinner she couldn't stop fretting over her boys.

"I left them a note and money to order pizza with." He responded,



pausing to take a bite of food. "They'll be fine. They're big boys now, Joyce."

"I know, I know. I'm just so used to having my eye on them these days."

He reached across the table and took her hand in his. "Loosen up some, babe. The boys will be fine. Let's just enjoy this, okay?" She smiled at him, squeezing his hand tightly.

"I'm sorry. I'm really bad at the whole dating thing."

"That's okay. That's why we're taking our time." He reassured her. He noticed the people around them watching them. Whispering amongst themselves. He missed living in the city briefly then. He knew the whole town was buzzing about them. He knew his reputation well. The drunken Chief with Lonnie's ex wife. Two broken people. The thought made him squeeze her hand again.

"Hey I'll be right back okay?" She said, motioning at the bathroom. He nodded and released her hand, turning his attention back to his half eaten chicken dinner.

In the bathroom Joyce stood at the mirror, washing her hands. She fussed with her hair. It didn't want to cooperate at home and instead of falling in ringlets, it fell limply at the sides of her face. He'd called her beautiful, but she wondered if he'd really been looking. The last few years had been rough on her, and she her fingers ran over the fine wrinkles setting into her features.

"You're here with Chief Hopper, aren't you?" Marissa, the town librarian, asked her from the next sink.

"Yeah..."

"Be careful with that one, Joyce. He's all bad habits and good looks. He left me hanging more than once."

Joyce's lips set into a stern line as she continued fussing over her hair, trying to decide just what to say. "He's a good man." Was the best she could muster before rushing from the bathroom.

"Hop, can we leave?" She asked, suddenly feeling crowded in the tiny restaurant. He nodded, grabbing the nearest waitress' attention for the check and to go boxes.

.

"Are you ready to go home?" He asked in the truck.

"Not really. I just felt I dunno- crowded. In there."

He nodded and turned, driving them out somewhere they could talk. He parked at the quarry where they could see the moon and the stars across the sky. He popped a George Jones cassette in player. "Listen Joyce, I know what people are saying about us-" She turned to him in the cabin of the truck, reaching for him. "You know I don't care what people say about me." She nodded, taking his hand. "I'd fight them all, ya know? If anyone said anything bad about you."

She slid closer across the bench seat until she was against his side. "Yeah someone just had some words of wisdom for me in the bathroom about you."

"I could tell someone said something by your face." He laughed, but he didn't ask. "You mean the world to me. You always have." He added, kissing the top of her head.

"I bet you say that to all the girls." She teased and he kissed the top of her head again.

"There's so much I wanna say to you, but I don't know how to."

She leaned across his lap and pulled the seat latch. "Then show me."

Jim felt as if he'd have a heart attack on the spot as she crawled into his lap. He shifted the cigarette between his teeth as she kissed the side of his jaw. His hands wandered her back. She pulled his tie loose and began unbuttoning his shirt. He stopped her and looked into her eyes, brushing her hair back from her face. He tossed the half smoked cigarette out of the window and pulled her face closer for a kiss.

"We're really bad at this dating thing." She mumbled against his lips, her hands roaming under his shirt.

"But we're really good at this kissing thing." He smiled, pausing to unbutton her blouse.

His fingers traced the lines of her ribs, his thumbs rubbing the soft flesh of her tummy. "You're so beautiful."

The windows steamed up in the Blazer and he rolled the windows down before laying her down in the seat, covering her body with his own. She started tugging at his belt when he stopped her.

"Hold on a sec-" He fumbled in the glove compartment and he quickly retrieved the small box, hiding it in his big hand.

"I really loved you back in high school, ya know. But I let you get away. I left, and I let Lonnie win. Then I came back this mess of a man after my divorce but we've been through so much together. And you taught me how to feel things again, Joyce. You make me wanna be a better man."

She kissed the side of his face. He braced himself on an elbow, opening the box and retrieving the small golden band. When tears welled up in her eyes he leaned forward and kiss them away.

"Oh Jim, I just don't know-"

He sat back on his heels, trying to hide the disappointment he knew was all over his face. "C'mon Joyce. Give us a chance. We've got a good thing going here. Give me a chance to make things right." When she sat up he pulled her close. "I want you, Joyce."

Her arms wound around his waist and she buried her face in his bare chest. "I'll make you forget all about Lonnie. I promise."

"I feel like we're doing this all so fast-" She began.

"I won't rush you-"

She took the ring from his hand and slid it on her finger, admiring it in the moonlight.

"Will you marry me?" When she nodded he kissed her forehead.

"I love you." He could feel her smile as he kissed her lips.

"I love you too."

## 5. Mornin

Jim gave himself one last once over before he pinned his badge to his chest. The split in his lip had pretty well healed and his eye was now a sickly shade of yellow.

He heard the country music before he entered the kitchen. She claimed to hate it, but she never complained when he played it around her. Joyce stood at the stove in his blue flannel shirt, the arms rolled up to her elbows. She swayed slightly as she cooked and he wrapped himself around her back, his arms around her waist and his lips at her neck. "You should be sleeping. The boy's won't be up for another hour."

"I hated mornings till I took up your routine." She said as he reached for the cup of coffee she'd made for him.

"Our routine. It was never like this at my house. Now mornings are coffee and contemplation and this-" he said, planting a kiss on the hollow behind her ear.

She cut the stove off and slid the eggs onto a nearby plate before stealing a sip of his coffee.

George Jones began playing on the radio and he gently pulled her to face him. "This is my favorite song. I swear they wrote it about me and you." He took her hand in his and placed his other on the small of her back. She rested her free hand on his shoulder and because of their height difference, her head rested on his chest.

As he swayed her he sang the words into her hair.

"I've looked for love in all the same old places  
Found the bottom of a bottle always dry  
But when you poured out your heart I didn't waste it  
'Cause there's nothing like your love to get me high."

He twirled her and she giggled, Joyce Byers actually giggled, and his chest expanded with a warmth he hadn't felt in a long, long time. When the song ended she moved to back away but Conway Twitty

crooned 'Hello Darlin' and he pulled her back to him.

"Jim, you're gonna be late."

"Wouldn't be the first time." He commented, twirling her around.

He spotted the boys at the kitchen table and he smiled at them, not wanting to let her go just yet.

"Boys!" She sputtered, stepping on his boot accidentally.

"Don't mind us." Jonathan offered.

"Hop you really should eat-" He smiled, she still called him Hop when she got flustered.

"I'll grab something at work. Besides, I'm late." He teased, nodding to the boys. "Morning boys." He added as he poured his coffee in his thermos.

"Morning Chief!" Will said cheerfully, already pouring his daily bowl of cereal.

"See ya later, sweetheart. Have a good day at work." Jim said. Reaching down to kiss her goodbye quickly.

.

At work Flo caught him by the elbow. "You're late, Hopper."

"I know. Sorry. Just couldn't tear myself away."

"You seem happier these days, Chief. Happy looks good on you."

He smiled at his secretary. "Yes ma'am, feels pretty good too."

Jim selected a sprinkled doughnut from the box in the corner of the office and made his way to his office. On his desk lay a note in Flo's handwriting. A young child with short hair had been spotted in the nearby woods. Immediately the hairs on the back of Hopper's arms stood up. He abandoned his doughnut and gathered his thermos and hat, headed for the door. "If anyone needs me, call me. Got

something to check out." He said to Flo in passing.

## 6. Bring Her Home

Jim sat motionless in the snow, a cigarette clinched between his teeth. The smoke curled around his bearded face and rose into the starless night. The box. He stared at it, making a mental note not to hold his breath. What if she does show up again? What means would he have to go to to keep her safe from Brenner and his crew? And what kinda life could Eleven have in Hawkins? She'd have to live her whole life looking over her shoulder. Hop draws his jacket closer around himself, shivering in the cold. He hopes she's warm, wherever she is. After an hour of waiting he places a small package of Eggos in the lock box and walks back to his truck, defeated.

.

Joyce was waiting for him at home, her big eyes warm with love.

"What's wrong?" Her face fell immediately and Jim's eyes shifted from her face to the their boys, surrounded by the neighborhood boys as they all watched tv together. He wrapped his arms around her and whispered into her hair.

"I was looking for our girl. She's been sighted, but not by me."

Joyce blinked up at him, squeezing his upper arms. "Oh I wish we could bring her home!" She said lowly as he stepped past her, taking a seat at the kitchen table.

Joyce's fingers drifted across his shoulders, pausing to press gently into his flesh. "Poor Mike, he hasn't been the same since she disappeared."

Hopper felt the full guilt of selling Eleven out to save Will's life. He'd felt it every day since she disappeared. Luckily she'd escaped Brenner, but what kinda life could she she be living between the upside down and the woods? Joyce's thumbs worked his sore shoulders and he leaned into her touch.

"We'll find her. I know it." She volunteered. He knew that she watched the lock box too, stopping by an hour before and after work



every day. "We'll find her. And we'll take care of her."

.

That night Joyce reached across the bed for his hand.

"C'mere. Come hold me." She urged and he scooted closer, letting her rest her head on his chest. "You've been so quiet all night. Don't beat yourself about it. We just have to have a little patience."

She drew little circles on his belly and the tickling sensation made the corners of his mouth turn upwards.

"I just hope she's warm. And she's eating."

"At least the waffles keep disappearing." She offered. "At least she's eating something." He breathed in deeply and she rode the motion out with her hand pressed to his chest, over his heart. "One step at a time, baby. We can't save the whole world at one time. We'll bring her home."

He pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "I know. But what if she does come back? Her mother's not capable of taking care of her. The Wheeler's aren't capable of keeping her safe..."

"I always wanted a girl." Joyce grinned. "She needs us. We need her."

.

Later during the night Jim lay on his side with Joyce's back pressed firmly against his bare chest. His fingers ghosted over her shoulder before he settled them over her belly. He nuzzled her neck lightly with his nose and breathed in deeply, enjoying the sweet smell of her perfume.

"Stop fidgeting." She fussed sleepily, pressing further against his chest and laying her hand on top of his.

"I love you, Joyce."

Her fingers laced with his and she squeezed them. "I love you too."

Their breaths fell into a gentle rhythm and soon he was asleep, dreaming of buying her a new house. Of watching the boys grow together. Faking paper work and adopting Eleven.

.

Hopper heard the sound, and Joyce was up and over him and out of bed before he could react. He followed Joyce clumsily, bumping into the wall outside of Will's door in his still sleepy state.

"Will, baby!" Joyce was in bed with him is heartbeat, silencing his screams. She held him as he cried and Hopper slid into bed beside him, flanking him with Joyce. His big hand covered Will's back below Joyce's protective hug.

"I went back! I went back there!" He wailed mournfully, his hands covering his face. "She's still there."

Hopper sucked in a breath, his hand gently rubbing the boy's back. "There's more monsters!" Will stressed and Joyce sighed this time, glancing across Will to meet Hopper's gaze.

Jonathan stood in the doorway, arms crossed, and listened.

## 7. Halloween

"Karen and Ted invited us to their Halloween party tomorrow night." Joyce casually dropped the news as she was folding laundry. "And you're off tomorrow..."

He sighed and crossed his feet on the coffee table, absorbed in rerun of Wonder Woman. "Joyce honey, you know I hate the holidays."

"But you know how fun drunk Karen is!" She protested, remembering all the times her closest girl friend had gotten plastered. Drunk Karen is a giggly, over sharing mess. "We don't have to stay all night. Just get dressed up and pop in for a little while-"

"I'm not dressing up."

"Please! For me!" She protested. "It'll be fun. Please."

He sighed heavily again and gestured towards the tv, a cigarette hanging between his fingers. "I'll only dress up if you wear that."

"Like Wonder Woman?" She asked, slightly flustered.

"Be my Wonder Woman and I'll dress up."

"You find the costume and I'll wear it." She bargained, confident that he wouldn't be able to find it on such short notice.

.

The next day was a blur. Joyce painted the lightning bolt across Jonathan's face and help spray dye his hair orange. Her own personal David Bowie. She finished the last few stitches of Will's wizard robes. Both boys planned on heading to the Wheeler's early to spend time with Nancy and Mike.

"Are you dressing up, Mom?" Will asked quizzically and she shook her head.

"Probably not." She chuckled as she kissed his forehead. He looked absolutely adorable in his oversized robe.

No sooner had the boys left for the Wheeler's, Jim stepped through the backdoor after work with Cujo hot on his heels. He paused to scratch the dog behind his ears and presented Joyce with one of the paper sacks he carried. Inside was a Wonder Woman costume.

"Jim!"

He smiled slyly, reaching in the fridge for a beer. She didn't have to know that Ted had extended the invitation to him a week before. Nor that he'd seen the costume in the store before their little deal happened. He had been beyond happy when she gave him a reason to buy it.

"A deal's a deal, Joyce. A costume for my Wonder Woman." He added with a kiss to her forehead.

.

"C'mon Joyce, let me see. I dressed up for you!" He said through the bedroom door where she had locked him out. He fidgeted with the cape around his shoulders, already annoyed with it. God he hated dressing up.

"I can't go in this, Jim! It's too revealing!"

"Let me be the judge of that!" He mumbled around the ill fitting plastic fangs in his mouth. Angrily he slipped them out and tucked them into his pocket. "C'mon, lemme see."

When the door finally opened he could barely keep his hands to himself. The costume hugged her just right in all the right places. The low cut bodice, the high cut shorts. He grabbed her by the wrist cuffs and brought her closer.

"Hotter than Lynda Carter, I dare say."

"You're a liar, Hop." He pulled her to his chest and let his hands roam.

"I'm serious Joyce. You look fantastic."

"That cape looks pretty hot on you, Jim."

He arched an eyebrow at her and offered her his arm.

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She wore his oversized work coat at first, self conscious and cold. He held her hand tightly as they stood on the Wheeler's doorstep.

"Joyce! Hopper!" Karen greeted warmly, clearly already tipsy. Jim passed over the giant bag of candy they'd brought. "I would have never dreamed you'd dress up, Hopper!" Karen jeered as she lead them in.

"Yeah well-"

Karen was dressed as a witch and she stopped to give Joyce a once over.

"What are you dressed as, Joyce? Give me your coat, I'll hang it up."

"I um-" She moved to protest but Jim moved in to unzip the jacket, smiling slyly as if he were unwrapping a present.

"This is my Wonder Woman."

"Woah! Joyce!" Karen exclaimed and Joyce crossed her arms over her chest. Karen made a tut-tut noise and moved her hands away. "You look hot!" A blush spread over Joyce's cheeks. "If it weren't for Hop and my Ted, I would take you home myself!" Karen winked at her before turning and heading for the living room.

"Ted! Hop and Joyce are here!" A blush spread across Joyce's face, turning her as red as her earrings. Jim stopped her in the hall and kissed it away.

.

Ted sat at a folding table in the living room, engrossed in a game of cards with several of the neighborhood men.

"Hop come join us!" He called without looking up from his hand.

When the table grew quiet he looked up and realized all eyes were on

Joyce. Jim shot Joyce a look and before she could really protest he sat at the table, pulling her down into his lap. He wanted to show her off. "C'mon baby, you're my good luck charm."

Karen brought Hopper a beer and a mixed drink for Joyce. "You can have her for now Hopper, but I want a dance later!"

She disappeared into the crowd, mingling with the rest of the adults. Ted passed Hopper a cigar and he gladly tucked away the plastic fangs again.

"Wh-where are the kids?" Joyce stammered, finally gathering enough courage to speak.

"Having their own party in the basement. You know, they're too cool for us old folks." Ted deadpanned, laying down his hand.

.

Joyce grew less self conscious with every mixed drink that Karen passed her. Hopper won several hands and he snaked his arm around her waist. "See, you are my good luck charm!"

Joyce unwrapped a sucker and placed it in her mouth, garnering all of Hopper's attention. Karen reached for her.

"Let's go check on the kids before I drink anymore." She winked.

Downstairs the kids were all bobbing for apples. A far more innocent activity than what some of the adults were up to upstairs.

"Mom!" Will pushed through his friends to make his way to Joyce. "You look just like Wonder Woman!"

With enough alcohol in her system Joyce was able to accept the compliment without blushing. Nancy, dressed as a cheerleader, shot her a dirty look from where she sat next to Jonathan on the couch. "You guys have fun! We're going to dance!" Karen said before she pulled Joyce back upstairs.

The women danced together for a few songs before Joyce threw in the towel and made her way back to Jim's lap.

"Still winning?"

"Not since you left." He replied, removing his cigar from his mouth so he could reach over and plant a kiss on her bare shoulder.

"I'm all danced out. Karen is a dancing machine!"

He leaned in close to whisper in her ear. "I think we should head home. I'm ready to take that costume off. With my teeth." He succeeded in making her blush again and he smiled broadly, the cigar clenched between his teeth.

"I'm all out of money boys, time for me to head home!" He announced, laying his cards down.

"Treat my Wonder Woman right, Hopper!" Karen warned as they headed for the door. He pulled her closer and reached for his coat, wrapping it around her shoulders.

"Oh, I will." He winked at Karen, his hand slipping down to cup Joyce's ass briefly before he reached for the door.

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Outside he outed his cigar, saving the remained of it for later. He stole the sucker from Joyce's mouth to kiss her in the Blazer. Home was just around the corner, but he was already squirming in the driver's seat. Her hand was warm on his thigh and as he drove she moved it slowly upwards.

"God, Joyce." She slid closer to him in the seat, her breath hot against his ear. He noticed he was breaking the speed limit, but as far as he was concerned this was official police business. He had to get home, as soon as humanly possible. She stole the sucker from his mouth and treated him to a show from the corner of this eye as he watched the road.

"You're killing me, here."

"Trick or treat, Chief Hopper." She asked as she passed the sucker back to him and her hand traveled across his lap.

"Treat me, please." He nearly drove off the road as she leaned into his lap. His knuckles were white on the steering wheel as she worked her magic. He groaned and tangled his hand in her hair, one hand on the wheel.

"Oh my god, Joyce."

.

Before they could get the front door open his mouth was all over her neck, leaving marks that would last for days. She untied his cape and let it fall to the floor in the living room. He picked her up and carried her through the house, laying her on the bed and covering her body with his own. He moved between her legs, causing friction between them.

"I think that Halloween-" he paused to grab her hips and bring her closer. "is my favorite holiday."



## 8. Smoke Rings

Jim stood across the room with his back to her. She admired his naked back in the moonlight as he shuffled around in the dark, attempting to put a record on the turn table. The needle skiffed across the vinyl and caught the groove, beginning to play as he ambled back to bed. He spread across the bed next to her and reached across her to retrieve his cigarettes off of the nightstand next to her. Tom Wait's 'Ol 55' began playing and she shot him a grin. He smiled around his cigarette, the cherry glowing brightly in the dark.

"You remembered!"

"I never forgot." He replied, crossing his arms under his head as he rested against the headboard. Joyce closed her eyes and hummed along, loosing herself in a memory.

.

Sitting at the quarry on a dark night in his car, her bare feet crossed on the dash. He took a mighty drag beside her and passed the joint to her, exhaling slowly and watching the smoke drift from the car. She inhaled to deeply and began coughing and sputtering, much to his amusement.

"Slow down there tiger." He teased over the music.

He offered her the bottle of cheap whiskey between them and she brushed it away, passing him the joint as she continued to clear her lungs.

"What's this guy's name again?" He asked when she caught her breath, referring to the music playing.

"Tom Waits. This is his first album, 'Closing Time'. Isn't he great?" She replied, her words tripping over each other.

"I guess so." He replied before taking a swig from the bottle.

She shifted and lay across the bench seat, laying her head on his thigh before reaching up to take the joint from him. His hand grazed

her breasts and came to rest lazily above her heart. When she passed him the joint back he made a show of blowing smoke rings and she watched them float out of the window and disappear into the starry sky.

"Hey Jimmy, can we stay like this forever?"

Jim reached for her hand and brought her back to the present. 'Closing Time' still played softly in the background, just like it had all of those years ago. "I bought the vinyl when I lived in the city. Sometimes I'd listen to it and think of you." He confessed.

"Seems like the older I get, the more I like it. I guess I needed a few years to really get it, ya know?"

Joyce threaded her fingers through his as they both smoked in silence for a few moments.

The song 'Martha' began playing and Jim sang around his cigarette. *"And those were the days of roses. Poetry and prose and Martha. All I had was you and all you had was me. There was no tomorrows. We'd packed away our sorrows and we saved them for a rainy day. And I feel so much older now and you're much older too. How's your husband? And how's your kids? You know that I got married too? Lucky that you found someone to make you feel secure 'Cause we were all so young and foolish. Now we are mature..."* He stopped singing and chuckled before kissing the back of her hand.

"I guess this song is about us in the grand scheme of things, huh? You're my Martha. You have no idea how many times I thought about calling you over the years."

Joyce outed her cigarette and moved into his lap, turning so that she could look into his eyes. "I pushed you away for so long, but I always wondered what could have been."

He outed his smoke too and ran his hands through her short hair, pausing to cup her cheeks before he pulled her close to kiss her. "You can't get rid of me this time." He teased.

She grinned as 'Ice Cream Man' began playing in the background and he kissed her smile. "You're ice cream man's back in town." He said playfully, biting his bottom lip before rolling them over onto her back.

## 9. Trouble

After dinner Jim stepped outside for some fresh air, fumbling in his shirt pocket for his smokes. He could hear sniffing from around the house and he stepped from the porch, his curiosity kicking in. Jonathan sat huddled against the side of the house with a cigarette dangling between his fingers, the cherry threatening to fall. He startled when Jim spoke to him.

"I really wish you wouldn't smoke."

"You're one to talk." He replied, glancing at the cigarette hanging from Jim's lips.

"What's troubling ya, kid?" He asked as he leaned against the side of the house, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I can't talk about it."

"You sure? It's got ya crying and smoking. Must be something serious."

Jonathan huffed and stomped out his cigarette. "I'm in trouble, Hop. And it's only gonna get worse."

"What is it kid? I can probably get you out of it."

"Not this time." He replied.

"Nancy's pregnant." Jim nearly dropped his cigarette.

"You sure it's not that Harrington kid's?" Jonathan shot him a dirty glance.

"No they broke up after Christmas. It's definitely mine."

"Jesus kid. She's only sixteen right?"

"Seventeen." Jonathan corrected him.

"That's awfully young. I imagine your Mom doesn't know yet?"

"No." Jonathan replied. "Will you tell her for me? She'll take it better if it comes from you!"

Jim chuckled and gritted his teeth on the filter of his cigarette. "Nah son, some things you just have to man up to. But if you want, I'll be there when you tell her. The sooner you tell her, the better."

Jonathan drew in a deep breath and puffed out his chest. "Think now's a good time?"

"Better than ever."

.

Jim coaxed Joyce into sitting at the table across from Jonathan and he sat next to her.

"What's going on?" Her eyes widened and Hopper reached for her hand, lacing his fingers between hers.

"Just let the kid talk."

"Uh Mom..." He stammered, playing with the hem of his shirt.

"Out with it, kid." Jim encouraged gently.

"Nancy's pregnant."

"Oh Jonathan." She repeated his name over and over, squeezing Jim's hand tightly. Jonathan held his head in his hands.

"Come on. This isn't the worst thing. There will be a new baby in the family." Jim encouraged.

"But you're both so young, you've barely experienced life! What about college, Jonathan? What about all your plans?" Joyce fretted.

He shrugged in response. "I'll just have to wait a little while."

Jim thought briefly about the California trip Joyce had wanted to make after high school and how young she was when he got word she was pregnant. "They're both good kids, Joyce. They'll work things

out. And we'll be there for them. And surely Karen and Ted will too."

Joyce's eyes widened. "Does Karen and Ted know?"

"Nancy said she'd tell them tonight."

Joyce stood and rounded the table and wrapped her arms around her eldest son. "Oh Jonathan. I'm so upset and so happy, I just don't know how to feel!"

"I'm scared." Jonathan admitted and Hopper reached across the table and grabbed his shoulder. "We'll be here for ya, son."

"How far along is she, Jon?"

"Six weeks."

.

"Will ya come to bed already?" Jim asked as Joyce paced the bedroom floor in one of his t-shirts.

"I'm so not ready for this. I thought it'd be years and years before I had grandchildren."

Jim leaned from the bed and captured her by the waist, pulling her into bed with him. "It can't be changed, sweetheart. Were you ready when Jonathan came along? I know with Sarah...I was an unprepared mess the entire time."

"I was ready for Jonathan. It was Will that was a surprise, honestly."

"I know they're really young but...it could be worse." Jim bargained again. "After last year, this is a piece of cake." He wrapped her in his arm, the side of her face resting against his heart. "Piece of cake. We got this."

"Karen and Ted must be so angry."

"There's no need for anyone to be angry. What's happened has happened. All that's left is to deal with it. May as well be happy."

Joyce sniffles against his chest, her tears wetting his shirt. "I'm going to be a grandmother! At thirty nine! I mean I'm young enough I could have another baby myself!"

Jim snorted, knowing all too well all the steps they'd taken to keep that exact thing from happening. "I mean if you want to..." He teased and she punched his gut lightly.

"You'll be a foxy grandma." He grinned, kissing the top of her head.

"You ready to be a grandpa?"

"Nah I'm too young for all that. I'm bailing before the baby comes." He teased and she knew it.

"You're a mean one, Jim Hopper. Love 'em and leave 'em." He pulled her closer and kissed her.

"I'm not going anywhere, baby."

.

Later Joyce shifted in her sleep turning her back to him and he rolled over too, wrapping his big arms around her and burying his face in her soft hair. When he closed his eyes he did something he hadn't done in years. Inwardly he said a few words of thanks to whatever deity that may be watching down on them. Thanks for his Joyce, his new family, and a chance to start over. To make things right. Even if it did mean fighting monsters and alternate dimensions. Everything fell in place and dropped Joyce right into his life again. That was all the proof of divine intervention that he needed.

"Love you." She mumbled in her sleep and he smiled before kissing her shoulder.

"Love you too, sweetheart."

## 10. Cold Shoulder

Joyce cradled the phone between her shoulder and her cheek as she shuffled through bills, surprised by the voice on the other end. "What's up? You never call from work."

She could hear Jim shuffling through paperwork too. "Just thought I'd check in. It's snowing pretty steadily out there." Her eyes fluttered to the window and the white blanket gathering outside. She wished he were home already. "I'll be missing dinner. Gotta pull a double tonight."

A double. Code word for working at the lab. Fear clinched her momentarily. No matter what he said, she couldn't bring herself to trust anything about that place. "Please be safe."

"I will." He promised. "Love you, sweetheart."

"Love you too." She replied before he hung up, ending their conversation with silence. She glanced at Jonathan's car, already hiding under multiple inches of snow, and said a silent thank you that at least her boys are home.

.

Hours later Jim stood with his hands on his hips, a sigh escaping his lips. He was tired to the bone and totally unprepared for this shit. "I'm not going in there again!"

"Remember our deal, Chief. We let you rescue the boy, you bring us the girl." Brenner replied, his arms crossed over his chest.

"I told you where she was. It's not my fault you lost her. I never agreed to bring her to you."

"We can always bring Will back here for testing."

"You'll never touch a hair on his head."

"I know all about your new little family-" Brenner said menacingly. "Such a fragile little enterprise. We know all about you and Joyce."



And the boys. And Nancy." Hopper's eyes narrowed angrily.

"If you were to so much as threaten them, I'd tear this whole building down myself. Brick by brick." Hopper threatened, confident in his words.

"You'll go in tonight. And you'll look for the subject."

Hopper's fists balled at his sides. "She's a girl. A child. Not a lab rat."

Brenner eyed him. "Put on your suit. You're going in."

"You know, I am the Chief of police. What if something happens to me while I'm in there?" He asked, a last ditch effort at saving himself from another trip in.

"You can be replaced easily, Hopper. If you want your family safe, you'll do this."

.

Joyce sat with her head in her hands, fretting over the bills as usual. She'd neglected mentioning anything about them to Jim, as she suspected he'd want to take over everything. A conversation, and probable fight, that was looming on the horizon. She'd worked too hard and too long just to give up and let a man take over but she knows how he is. Her attention snapped back to the present when the light above her flickered. She sucked in a breath quickly, her palms flattened on the table. It's an old house. Lights flicker, right? The living room like flickered and before she could think about it, she stood in the refurbished hallway between the boys' doors. When that light flickered too, she began to panic and peeked into Will's room. He was sleeping soundly on his side, his face illuminated by the moonlight. He seemed peaceful enough. Jonathan was as well. Sound asleep on his back, his headphones still playing. Joyce sucked in a breath, watching for more light flickers and getting ready to run with her boys.

"Oh Hopper, why couldn't you be home right now?" She could swear she felt someone else in the house, right over her shoulder. When she turned, nothing was there.

.

No sooner than Jim's headlights lit up the driveway, Joyce bounded barefoot in the snow to his truck.

"Sweetheart! Get back inside, you'll freeze out here." He chided briefly before she flung herself into his arms.

"The lights and the boys and something's in the house!" Noticing her lack of shoes and her near hysterics, Jim lifted her off her feet and carried her back into the house. He set her down just inside the house and shut the door, shaking the snowflakes from his shoulders.

"Now slow down. What happened?"

"The lights were flickering and I swear something's here."

He slipped into cop mode immediately, pushing her behind him with one arm while he readied his hand above his gun. He swept from room to room, checking for any intruders or monsters. He found the boys sleeping just as she had earlier.

"Joyce look, it's been snowing so heavily it's just probably messing with the power. Everything's okay baby." He didn't have the heart, nor the liberty, to tell her he knew exactly what had been in the house. Him.

.

They were sitting at the dinner table, she smoking and he eating his leftover dinner, when the power blinked out totally.

"Oh great." He commented. In this weather, there was absolutely nothing they could do about it.

Joyce busied herself immediately with waking up the boys so they could put on warmer bedclothes while she dug out extra blankets. Jonathan agreed to sleep with Will for warmth. When they were sufficiently clothed in extra clothes and socks and under a heap of blankets she finally began to relax some.

Already in a pair of fleece sweatpants, Joyce stepped into a pair of

fuzzy socks and a Hawkins high sweatshirt. She scoffed when Jim exited the bathroom in a pair of sweat pants and a henley.

"What? You've got three blankets on our bed and enough fuzzy material to start a friction fire. I'll be warm enough. I promise." He said, throwing up his hands.

Hopper found himself on his side with her curled against his back with her arm around his middle, holding him tightly against her and he rubbed his thumb across the back of hand, just feeling her soft skin. The air inside was cold enough he could see his breath in the darkness but her warmth against his back was more than enough. He rubbed the golden band on her ring finger.

"Will you go to sleep already?" She teased from behind him.

"Hey Joyce, you ever feel blessed?"

"Every day." She replied before pressing a kiss to the back of his neck, sending a shiver down his back.

.

In the morning Joyce woke up sweating in the empty bed. The power, and the heat, was back on. She glanced at the clock, realizing she'd slept through everything, Jim would be at work already and the boys at school. The men in her life must've conspired together to let her sleep in, as they occasionally did.

The sound of the phone startled her and she leapt from the bed after it.

"Hello?"

"Joyce-" Jim sounded breathless over the phone. "Come down to the station, I've got Jonathan."

"Jonathan!?"

"He's okay, just get down here, please. I've got a mess on my hands."

"Be right there!" She chimed, the anxiety already building in her.

Quickly she changed into a pair of jeans and Jim's Hawkins Police Department hoodie. Once she had her shoes on and keys in hand she was in the car, racing her way into town.

.

Jim met her at the doorway of the station, guiding her to his office with a hand on her lower back.

"Oh Jonathan!" Her oldest sat in Jim's office with an ice pack held to his left eye. "Jonathan what happened?"

"Ted Wheeler happened." Jim interjected. Joyce was already crouched at Jonathan's feet, fussing over his face but at Jim's confession she stopped and turned to look at him.

"He didn't take the news about Nancy so well." Jonathan added. "He said I was just like Lonnie, turning his Nancy into another Joyce."

Joyce gasped, feeling the heat rise up her neck into her cheeks. "Jonathan what did you do? Did you fight back?"

"Hopper ended it." He replied and for the first time Joyce noticed Jim's bruised knuckles.

She stood, fussing over the man in her life. "You didn't have to do that." She said as she took his bruised hand in hers.

"Yes I did. I'll fight em all, remember?"

She kissed his cheek before turning her attention back to her boy.

"I hate that it all came down to this. Ted and I always got along so well." Jim sighed, taking a seat at his desk.

"What are we going to do?" Joyce fretted.

"Just give Ted some time to cool down. This'll all blow over."

"Uh Mom, I'll see you at home. I told Nancy I'd meet her to talk. She knows what happened." Joyce squeezed his hand and nodded before he stood. "Thanks, Hopper."

The older man nodded. "Just steer clear of her parents for a little bit, okay?" Jonathan nodded as he made his way to the door.

Joyce rounded Hopper's desk and sat on it in front of him. He rubbed her knee thoughtfully. "It's going to be a long eight months, isn't it?" She asked.

"We'll get through it together. Remember, we've been through hell already. Everything else is a cake walk."

## 11. Needs

"Had your lunch yet?" Joyce asked, clutching the phone.

"No." He replied.

"I need you."

"Is something wrong-" she stopped him mid sentence. "No no. I need you, Chief." He sighed contently, all the sudden anxiety draining away and being replaced by a broad grin across his face.

"I'll be home in ten. Don't go anywhere." He teased.

"Yes Sir."

Joyce couldn't sit still after she hung up. She felt slightly guilty, calling him like that, but it had been one hell of a day. And besides, she knew the request would make his day. It wasn't often they had true 'alone time'. Both boys were still in school for another hour. Karen invited her out to eat lunch with her and Nancy in a few hours and Joyce couldn't tell if Karen was genuinely okay with the situation, or if she was doing a better job at hiding her rage than Ted was. Work had been rough and she was fighting off a headache but she couldn't wait for Jim to get home.

.

He met her in the kitchen, all wandering hands and lips.

"Rough day?" He mumbled against her lips.

"You have no idea."

He unholstered his gun, setting it on the bar before turning his attention back to her. His hands gripped her bottom and lifted her, carrying her away to the bathroom.

"Here?"

"Indulge me." He commented, his beard scratching her neck as he

kissed her there. "You won't let me have you in the kitchen or on the couch..."

"My kids spend time there! They spend time in here too-" he kissed her roughly, silencing her complaints.

"It's the bathroom." He sat her on the sink and slid his hands under her shirt. He leaned between her knees, laying her back against the mirror as he covered her torso with nibbles and kisses. "Stop thinking so much." He growled, unbuttoning her jeans. "No one's here, talk to me. Tell me how much you want me. Moan for me. Do something, sweetheart." He pleaded, freeing her of her pants.

"I'm sorry, baby." She admitted, pulling him into her arms and kissing him. "You look so hot in your uniform, Chief."

"That's more like it!" He slid his hand into her panties, feeling just how much she wanted him before he pulled them off and tossed them away. He pushed his hat back on his head and knelt down. Her legs trembled around him as he crouched between them, his hand working in tandem with his worshipful mouth. He looked up momentarily as he worked her over with his hand. "C'mon, no one's home. Lemme hear it baby."

"Oh you're too good at this." She moaned and grinned between her thighs.

.

He pushed her over the edge, enjoying the noises she made. She wrapped her legs around his neck and he caressed her thighs, pleased with himself.

"C'mere, I need more of you."

He stood and she worked on the buttons of his uniform shirt as he fought with his belt. He managed to get his pants and boxers down his thighs and she squeaked when he grabbed her bottom again, pulling her to the edge of the sink. He produced a condom from the pocket of his shirt.

"Good man." She commented as he rolled it on.

"Now, where were we?"

She grabbed his wrist, checking the time. "Pick it up, baby. We gotta hurry."

"Call me Chief again." He breathed as he moved, nearly pulling her off the sink.

She stole his hat and placed it on her head, grabbing him by the biceps. "Harder, Chief Hopper."

He grunted obscenities under his breath as he moved faster, knocking her against the mirror. She laughed and gripped his shoulders when she accidentally turned on the water, startled at the cold wetness soaking the back of her shirt. He slid his hands underneath her and effortlessly picked her up, moving to press her against the door. His hat got lost somewhere in the transition and her hair fell into his face as he pressed against her, his movements growing more erratic. He watched her lips as she moaned his name over and over again.

"Chief I'm gonna-" Before she could finish the sentence she fell over the edge again, taking him with her.

"Jesus. Fuck. Joyce, we should do this more often." He said as he pressed his forehead against hers, still pressing her against the door.

"Just what I needed, baby." She breathed, clinging to him as he sat her back down on her feet. She grabbed his wrist and checked his watch again. "Shit!" She scrambled to dress as he took his time. "We didn't leave you enough time to eat, either."

"Oh, I'll live." He laughed, stealing a kiss as she wiggled back into her jeans.

.

She heard a key scrape the lock on the front door and she bounded out of the bathroom, shutting the door behind her and leaving him alone to finish dressing and hiding all the evidence.

"Hey boys, how was school?"



Jim grinned as he tucked in his shirt and grabbed his hat off the shower floor. He washed his hands and thinking quickly, reached over and flushed the toilet with his foot. He waited a beat or two and made his exit from the bathroom. Both boys paused to look at him.

"Hey guys." He greeted warmly before turning to Joyce. "Thanks for lunch sweetheart, it was great, but I gotta get back to work. I'll see you tonight." He stole a kiss before retrieving and re-holstering his gun. "See ya later, boys."

Jonathan shot Joyce an odd look as she turned away, busying herself with cleaning the kitchen. "Mom, why is the back of your shirt wet?"

Joyce mocked surprise and grabbed her shirt to turn it and look at the wet spot. "Must've wet it when I was mopping earlier or something." She mused, hoping he'd buy it. What could he be thinking anyway? For all he knew she'd had a quiet lunch with Hopper and he used the bathroom before heading back to work.

"Listen, Karen invited me over for lunch so I'll be gone a little while." Jonathan moved to protest but she cut him off. "It'll be just us and Nancy. It's time for the girls to weigh in on this situation."

.

Karen's smile was warm enough when Joyce showed up at the diner, freshly showered and warm in Jim's hoodie. She needed all the comfort she could get in this tense situation. Nancy didn't look up when Joyce greeted her, but she spoke in return. When Joyce opened her arms to her the teen stood and moved into them.

"You aren't angry, Ms. Byers?"

"Of course not, baby." Joyce replied, rubbing the girl's back in a soothing gesture. "I mean the timing could have been better, but this isn't the end of the world."

She took her seat in the booth opposite the mother and daughter.

"I'm sorry what Ted did, Joyce." Karen offered.

"I'm sorry Hopper ended it the way he did."

"Ted deserved it after what he said. I'm really sorry." Karen added.

"Nothing I haven't heard before." Joyce retorted softly. "The rumor mill has been all about me these last few months."

Karen's eyes fell on the gold band around Joyce's finger. "So it is true?" Joyce glanced at her, unsure what she meant for a beat.

"Oh, you mean Jim? Yeah. The rumor mill has had fun with that one." She flexed her fingers, admiring the band. "He says I'm making an honest man out of him. Speaking of honest men, my whole family's with you every step of the way Nancy. We're here for you. And Jonathan will be attending every doctor's appointment, if you want him to."

Nancy nodded, her hands clasped in her lap.

"This won't be the easiest thing in the world, but we're all here for you." Her mother offered.

## 12. Tying the Knot

Jim was late getting home. He'd been asked to appear in court in connection with a case he'd worked on months before. Back when things were normal. Before the christmas lights and monster. Afterwards he'd taken a two hour lunch break with Judge Jim Winchester in his office. It was nice to catch up with the old man, they'd worked together briefly in the city. Hopper thought pretty highly of the older man and his wife, whom he'd been acquainted with. She usually ran the holiday parties for the police department in the city, and she always had a kind word for him.

Winchester was overjoyed to hear of Hopper settling down again in the sleepy little town.

"I'm in town until tomorrow night, and I do owe you a favor Hopper." He winked at the younger man.

"I couldn't ask her to do that." Hopper laughed. "I had to beg her to say yes. Do you know how much I'd have to beg her for something like that?"

"You're a good man, Jim Hopper. If she knows what's good for her, she'll put the cuffs on Hawkins' most eligible police Chief." Hopper laughed and leaned back in his chair. "I know she must be something if she's got you ready to settle down after all this time."

"Oh she is. She's a pistol, that's for sure. And so beautiful."

"Try your luck and ask her, Hopper."

.

Back at home a few hours later, he turned over the prospect in his mind as he sat at the kitchen table. How would he even broach the subject? She probably wanted a big, elaborate wedding. One that she deserved. One that he'll gladly give her, if that's what she wants.

"Hey Joyce can I ask you something kind of personal?" She finally took a break from washing dishes and turned to meet his gaze.

"When you and Lonnie got married, did you have a big service?" She laughed, drying her hands in a towel.

"I was seven months pregnant and big as a house. We ran off to Indianapolis and eloped. My parents were pissed." She laughed at the memory.

"When we get married, do you want a big service?"

She looked thoughtful at his question. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that question." She confessed. "I love you. And I want you. But I don't know if I want a traditional wedding. I'm not really religious, and I can't really wear a white dress with a straight face-

He bit his lip, playing with the hem of the tablecloth. "Well, uh, there's a friend of mine -a judge, and he owes me a favor."

She caught his train of thought. "A courthouse wedding! Honey that would be great!"

"Well, he's only here till tomorrow night..."

Later at dinner the boys were asked their opinions and both boys agreed they'd be happy with a Hopper for a stepfather so long as Joyce was happy. Jonathan even offered his services as a photographer. Will had been so happy he threw his arms around Jim's middle.

.

The next morning the couple woke up with a mission.

"What do I need to do?" She asked, buzzing about their room in an anxious manner.

He grabbed her by the shoulders, stilling her. "Go find yourself the prettiest dress you can find and meet me at the courthouse at five, okay? I'll bring the boys." She bit her lip and he rubbed her shoulders comfortingly.

"Are you ready for this?" He asked, not entirely sure he was ready himself. She stood on her tiptoes and reached to kiss him. He still had

to bend down to reach her and he smiled into their kiss.

"Of course I am." She spoke against his mouth.

She slipped into the shower first as he woke the boys. He manned the coffee pot as Jonathan cooked a quick breakfast. Jim smiled when he seen her walk into the kitchen in jeans and his department hoodie.

"Stop stealing my clothes, woman." She stuck her tongue out as she joined her boys for breakfast and Jim slipped off to the shower, too excited to stomach anything other than coffee.

.

After Joyce left the boys gathered up their Easter Sunday clothes and took inventory of what they had. Jonathan had just shined up his shoes and Will was fighting his tie when Jim emerged from the bathroom, his shirt unbuttoned, barefoot, with his tie hanging loosely around his neck.

Both boys stopped to stare at him momentarily. "What?" He asked, pausing to button his shirt in the hall.

"Your beards gone!" Will mused.

"I figured I'd clean up some-" Jim replied.

He crossed the room and took Will's tie in his hands, skillfully knotting it in a windsor knot. He knotted his own tie slowly, letting Will watch what steps he was taking. He wasn't surprised a bit that their father hadn't taken the time to show such a skill to his youngest boy. When Will's eyes widened with understanding he untied it and crouched to eye level with the younger boy.

"Here, you try it. It's easier to figure out if you're not wearing it." It took Will a few times, but he succeeded. His little victory made him grin and Jim mirrored the emotion. "Good job, kid."

Jonathan stood behind them, watching the whole interaction with rapt attention. His own tie was undone. "Mom usually does mine for me."

"I'll teach you!" Will volunteered cheerfully and Jim made a break for the bedroom door, suddenly overcome with a weird feeling he didn't know how to describe. He immediately dug around in his underwear drawer, his hiding spot for everything, and found the ring set he'd bought. A diamond for her, a simple golden band for him. He'd ordered them the night she said yes.

.

Across town Karen eyeballed Joyce, who stood in her doorway with a garment bag nearly as big as she is.

"You're what?"

"Getting married. In-" Joyce checked her watch "-three hours. Crazy, I know! I was hoping you and Nancy could work your magic on me?"

Karen smiled broadly and ushered her friend in the door, calling upstairs for Nancy. Joyce changed into the dress in front of the floor length mirror in the Wheeler's bathroom. It was a royal blue, floor length with a slit up to her thigh, and sleeveless. She wasn't so sure about the neckline that showed off her cleavage. She couldn't remember the last time she'd worn pantyhose, much less a dress like this.

"C'mon out Joyce. Let's see." Karen called from the other side of the door.

"Just a second!" She called as she fumbled for the small silver stud earrings the boys had given her for Christmas.

Nancy and Karen both looked her up and down when she exited the bathroom. She winced in pain over the pinching of the black heels she wore, but she wouldn't have to endure it long. The girls ushered her in front of Karen's vanity and fell into makeover mode. Nancy painted her nails a deep blue to match her dress. Karen rolled her hair until it fell in dark ringlets around her face.

They both agreed on minimal makeup. "Your eyes are so pretty already, you don't need heavy makeup." Karen complimented her. She used a little mascara on her, a little eyeliner. Nancy spritzed

some amazing smelling perfume on her.

"One more thing!" Karen reached for her jewelry box and presented her with a pretty silver chain with a single diamond dangling from its center.

"Karen! Is that real? I can't-"

Karen shushed her as she fastened it around her neck. "Something borrowed. You can give it back to me later."

She hugged Joyce from behind, looking at their reflections. "Really, it's about time you two got married. He's been making puppy dog eyes at you for years." She teased and a slight blush spread across Joyce's face. "Take millions of pictures. I want to see them all!" She added.

Joyce turned on the seat and took Karen and Nancy's hands in her own. "Thank you so much for all of this. Really."

.

At the courthouse Jim paced the floor, fidgeting with the bouquet of roses in his hands.

Jonathan stopped him and presented him with a piece of paper. A reservation for two for the fancy hotel uptown. "A wedding present from Will and I." Jonathan explained.

Jim clapped a hand on the younger man's shoulder. "Thank you." He added, wishing he knew more to say to convey just how much the gesture meant to him.

"She's here!" Will called from the doorway and Jonathan began turning Jim to face him and away from the door.

"What are you doing kid?"

"Bad luck to see the bride before the wedding, remember?" Jonathan replied, taking the roses from him. His hands empty, he began fidgeting with his tie and his coat.

He watched Jonathan's face light up as she came inside. "Mom you look beautiful!" He passed the roses past Jim's shoulder and before the older man could turn around the door to the closest room clicked shut.

Jim handed the ring box to the smaller boy. "I'll let you handle this part, kiddo."

Jim knocked on the door between him and Joyce. "Sweetheart, are you ready for this?" He heard her nervous laugh from behind the door.

"As I'll ever be. I can't believe we're doing this, Jim."

.

Judge Winchester whistled as Jim and Jonathan walked into the courtroom. "You sure clean up nice, son."

Jim chuckled nervously as he stood in front of the judge. "Thanks. This is Jonathan, Joyce's oldest. Her youngest Will is walking her in."

"Nice to meet you, Jon." The older man nodded. Jonathan greeted him in return and took a seat, readying his camera.

Will held the door and when Joyce stepped through all the air left Jim's lungs. He felt tears well up and he took a moment to wipe them away with his sleeve. She looked so beautiful he could hardly believe she was crossing the courtroom to stand by him.

Will held her hand until she got to Jim, then he passed their rings to them before he went to sit by Jonathan. Joyce smiled and reached to rub Jim's smooth cheek.

"Joyce it's very nice to meet you." Judge Winchester commented and she smiled up at him. "Jim's a very lucky man. You look very beautiful." Her face flushed and Jim felt his heart do a somersault.

.

The entire service lasted fifteen minutes. Before he knew it, she was back in his arms and he was moving in for their kiss. He took her face



in both hands and kissed her with everything he had. All the emotion of the day. The Judge and both boys clapped for the newly married couple. Jim pulled away and she mouthed the words 'I love you'. He smiled and echoed the sentiment before she moved in and kissed him again, wrapping her arms around his back.

When they parted Jim approached the bench and extended his hand to Judge Winchester. The old Judge smiled and shook Jim's hand heartily.

"It was my pleasure, Jim. You make a fine family. My wife Anita always thought you'd be quite the catch for some fine lady."

### 13. A Night to Remember

Joyce's eyes barely left her new husband's as they sat across from each other at the dinner table. The steakhouse had been a last minute suggestion on Jim's behalf after the ceremony but it felt right, sitting with his new family around a linen draped table while country music played softly in the background.

Will sat next to Jim and he squirmed in his seat, ready to go home and report today's developments to his friends. The wedding as well as his new knowledge that the Chief liked his steaks bloody, which was unheard of in his little family. Jim made a thin joke about being extra masculine and Joyce rolled her eyes at him, cutting into her well done steak. She retorted by stating that she preferred her steak not mooing from her plate. He chuckled and the dimples in his smile made her feel weak.

The four of them slipped into an easy discussion on the next two days. Joyce will call Donald in the morning and if he didn't accept the fact he'd have to run the store without her the next two days, Jim would have to put her under house arrest. And Flo can totally run the department without him for two days. Not like she doesn't run it anyway.

Jim informed her of the reservations the boys had made for them and she hugged her eldest to her, reaching across the table for Will's hand. Jonathan assured his mother that both boys would be in school like they were supposed to be and he was totally capable of taking care of Will. He declared that Joyce's only job was to enjoy herself.

"I'll see to it that she does." Jim declared with a sly smile and Joyce shot daggers at him across the table before breaking out into a smile.

The comment hadn't gone unnoticed by the eldest of her boys who crinkled his nose. "Hey Will, I think we should head home. It's getting late." The smaller boy nodded, stifling a yawn behind his hand. He'd probably be asleep before they got home.

Unsure of what to do, Jim ruffled Will's hair before the boy stood. "Goodnight boys, be safe." He added. Joyce hugged both of her boys

and thanked them for their wedding gift. Jim echoed the sentiment and signaled for the check as the boys left the restaurant.

.

Joyce leaned into his side as they walked back to his truck. She'd had a glass or two of wine more than he had with dinner and her steps were unsteady. He helped her up into the truck and after shutting the door for her he slid into the driver's seat. She slid across the seat and resumed her spot under his arm as he pulled out onto the road.

She fumbled around in the glove compartment until she found the cassette she wanted and pushed it into the radio. Tom Waits' crooning voice filled the cab and her hand found it's way to his thigh, all tiny and warm on the fabric of his pants. When 'Martha' began playing she asked him to sing to her before she reached across him and rolled his window down, letting in the cool air that disheveled her curled hair. She rested her head against his chest, listening to the sound of his voice as he sang.

.

In the hotel lobby he wrapped his coat around her shoulders before he took her hand and approached the desk, leaving their luggage for the bellboy. Jonathan had reserved them the honeymoon suite and Jim wondered just how long the kid had been saving up for this. The lady at the desk congratulated them and Joyce kissed his cheek.

In the empty elevator her kisses grew hungrier and he nearly knelt at her feet right there in the small room. He watched the floor numbers tick by and silently encouraged the elevator to move faster. She pulled his tie until he bent to her level and she wrapped her arms around his neck, whispering "I love you. I love you," into his ear. At the elevator's ding he swept her off her feet and carried her out of there, carrying her down the hallway and counting down the numbers on the doorways. He fumbled with the key and managed to unlock their door with one hand as she giggled, clutching his neck.

Once inside the door she slid down his body, making sure to generate as much friction as she could in doing so. His hands were shaking so badly he could barely place the 'Do not disturb' sign on the door

before he locked it for the night. The room was huge and extravagantly decorated in various shades of browns and reds. It was the biggest bed he'd ever seen in a room and he immediately began visualizing the many ways he could use it to his advantage.

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Joyce had found the champagne and poured them each a glass. He downed his in one go, ready to get to the task at hand. He moved behind her and unzipped her dress with gentle hands. She let the dress fall from her body in one slip and she looked so beautiful standing in black lace, looking over her shoulder at him. He placed small kisses on her shoulder as his hands explored her body like they had so many times before.

She turned in his embrace, stepping from the pool of her dress and began unknitting his tie, pulling it loose and draping it around her own neck. She began unbuttoning his shirt painfully slow and he grew impatient quickly, swatting her hands away and doing it himself. She began working on his belt and pulled it from his pants in one swift motion.

He grabbed his undershirt by the back of the neck and pulled it over his head, tossing it across the room in the direction he'd thrown his shirt. Joyce helped him dispose of his pants and she laughed at him as he struggled to get out of his shoes and socks.

"The least sexy part of a striptease." He admitted with a grin as she kissed him. Finally down to just his boxers he grabbed the bottle of champagne and sat on the edge of the bed and pulled her to him, kissing the expanse of creamy white skin under her bra. He couldn't believe the fancy lace lingerie she'd worn just for him. Stockings, garters, she was wrapped up like a present just for him to unwrap. He downed another swig of the champagne and dispatched her bra, taking his time with placing kisses all over her torso. He got down to her stockings and heels before he knelt at her feet, arching one of her slender legs over his shoulder and moving her underwear aside.

She could barely stand under his siege and he held her steady as he worked her over. By the time he spread her out across the huge bed she was a giggly mess and he was so relieved to see the joy on her

face. She reached for his boxers.

"Jim, let me-"

"No time." He commented, squirming out of them and tossing them aside. "I need to be inside of you."

She turned the bottle up to her lips and drank, enjoying the warm fuzzy feeling from the alcohol and Jim's insistent fingers working inside her. "Oh god. Chief Hopper-" She moaned and he leaned into a sloppy kiss, smiling against her lips.

"You're so beautiful, Mrs. Hopper." He said smugly as he moved down her body, undoing her garters with his teeth and running a hand beneath her panties. The blush extending from her cheeks to her neck was lovely and he stopped to kiss her collarbones.

"You're killing me here, husband." She said, reaching down to grab his ass and pull him closer.

"We've got all night for me to frustrate you as much as I want." He bragged and she squirmed under him.

"I thought you were getting impatient." She pouted. He lifted her leg and skimmed the pantyhose with his lips, placing small kisses as he went and causing her to giggle.

"I got all the time in the world for this." He kissed his way up her legs again and back to his previous task, gripping her bottom to keep her grounded. She moaned his name under him, squirming and tangling her hands in his hair until she was nearly screaming, crossing her ankles behind his neck and keeping his warm breath on her center as she came undone.

Standing, he hooked his arms around her legs and dragged her closer to the edge of the bed. Hopper tugged her panties down and tossed them across the room before taking his position between her legs. He entered her painfully slow, enjoying her wet heat.

"God, pick it up Hop." She said impatiently, turning her head to the side and gripping at the sheets. He moved his hips in and out slowly, running his hands from her hips to her knees. "You're the worst." She

complained and he smiled, reaching up to circle her center.

"We've been running around having quickies when the kids weren't home. Isn't it nice to enjoy this?"

She grabbed at his ass desperately trying to get him to move faster. He pushed into her rather harshly in return and she squeaked in surprise. He began rocking into her in a gentle rhythm and she grabbed his shoulders, pulling him forward to kiss him.

"Just enjoy the ride, baby." She laughed at unintentional joke as he his teeth sought her neck, leaving love bites behind.

As he moved his fingers grasped her wrists, pressing her hands above her head with one hand. He could feel her erratic heart beat under his palm. Moving slowly, his eyes traveled over her beautiful body. Her eyes were dark with desire and she growled under him, arching her back so that her hips rolled up to meet his.

"Right there." She moaned, rolling her hips against his again. His hands skimmed the soft skin of her belly until his hands bracketed her hips and pulled them back to him harshly. "Give it to me." She moaned under him, squirming to generate friction. "Stop holding back."

He stopped completely then and wrapped her slender legs around his waist. Sliding his hands under her ass he lifted her off the bed and held her weight, sinking into her completely. He figured her bite to his neck was her seal of approval and he began moving, lifting her body up and down and meeting that sensitive spot, making her moan.

"How's this?"

Unable to speak she nodded against his neck, her hands clutching his shoulders. Her muscles began tightening around him and he moved them back to the bed, stretching out across it and holding her to his chest as they moved together. They came together with her face buried in his neck, panting and exhausted.

"Damn, damn, damn." He panted, his hands smoothing the muscles of her back until they tangled in her hair.

"I take it you enjoyed yourself?" She laughed, riding out his inhales and exhales while she lay on his chest. "You're amazing, Mrs. Hopper."

In the shower afterwards Joyce sighed into his touch as his fingers worked the shampoo through her hair.

"So how was your big day, sweetheart?" He asked as he took the removable shower head and began washing the suds from her hair.

"Aside from my boys being born, this has been the best day of my life."

He grinned behind her and made a noise of approval. She turned to face him and embraced him, wrapping her arms around his waist. He reached above her and hung the shower head up, letting the hot water pour down onto the both of them before he placed small kisses on her forehead.

"You're part of our family now. Not that you weren't before-" she said correcting her own statement, "but now you're officially the part of my family that I've been looking for all these years."

She sniffled lightly, fighting back the tears that had been threatening to fall all day. He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her while the water ran across his shoulders and down his body, shielding her from the spray.

"What if we hadn't broken up in high school? Would we have been this happy all these years?"

He inhaled sharply, still holding her upturned face, and kissed her again. "We're happy now because of all the hardships that have gotten us here. The kids being born, the other marriages, the fights, the deaths, the divorces. Loosing Will. It all lead us right here. Honestly, I wouldn't change any of it. There's no where else I'd rather be right now."

Her brown eyes darkened with thought and he bent down to kiss her nose.

"Besides maybe back in bed with you under me." He added with a smile and a wink, earning a light smack against his bare chest.



## 14. Chief

Jim woke up with a moan as Joyce held his thighs, working her magic with her mouth.

"Oh baby," he sighed, stretching beneath her. "Good morning to you too."

He leaned his head back into the pillows, gently guiding her motions with his hand on the back of her head. "Fuck," he moaned under his breath. She pushed him over the edge and he fell hard, rolling his hips up into her open mouth.

"God damn, Joyce." He panted as she moved up to lay next to him.

"Good morning husband." She smiled before planting a kiss on his shoulder.

A knock on the door interrupted their temporary reprieve. "Breakfast is here." She announced to him before wrapping the housecoat around her naked form and sprung up to answer the door. The movement caused the housecoat to rise and give him a peek of her bare bottom. Yeah, it's definitely shaping up to be an excellent morning.

The couple kicked back in bed and ate breakfast together, giving up and watching Sesame Street when they couldn't find anything interesting on tv.

After breakfast, he brushed his teeth and made it his mission to distract her as much as possible while she called her boss. "Hey Chrissy, can I speak to Donald?" She asked as Jim moved the housecoat aside, kissing her bare shoulder. While on hold she covered the phone with her hand and scowled at him. "Will you knock it off?" He grinned fiercely and turned his attention to her collarbones, nipping and soothing them with his tongue across them. "Hey Donald, this is Joyce. I can't be there today or tomorrow-" she disguised her laugh with a cough when Jim bit the outer shell of her ear. "Actually I got married- thanks very much, it was sort of a last minute deal." Jim's stubble scratched her neck as he left kisses there,

his hands wandering beneath her robe. "Yeah, Jim and I finally got married. Thanks so much, Donald. I'll see you monday."

She hung up the phone and pushed at Jim's shoulders. "You jerk!" She laughed as he moved in on her again, his mouth closing around the pulse point at her neck.

While he called Flo, she busied herself with brushing her teeth and combing her hair. She didn't know what he had on the agenda for the day, but she kinda wished they'd spend all day in bed. He was all hers for the next two days, and she hoped he'd keep up this deliciously torturous mood he was in. She could hear him talking in the next room.

"Yeah Callahan, I got married. To your Mom. You can call me Daddy now. Put Flo on the phone already, will ya?" Finding a chance to mess with him, she slid up in bed beside him and reached for him. "I can call you Daddy," she stressed the last word and he glared at her playfully, one eyebrow arched, "Mornin Flo! Yeah I know this is pretty early for me. I'm having a pretty good morning-

"You're welcome!" Joyce mouthed to him and he grinned.

"Yeah, she finally made an honest man out of me-

"I made a man out of you, Daddy!" He rolled his eyes at her.

"I know, you told me so. So I'm on my honeymoon, I won't be back till Monday-

.

"So I'm Daddy now, huh?" He said quietly, as she climbed into his lap on all fours.

"I prefer calling you Chief Hopper." She replied, kissing his stubbled jaw.

"I did bring my cuffs along, just in case. Cuffs, badge, and gun."

"And your hat, you know it turns me on." She added.

"And my hat." He replied, palming her ass before giving it a smack. "Break any laws today, little miss?"

"I'll never tell." She said and he smacked her bottom again.

"I think you have. Don't make me cuff you."

The ringing of the phone startled them both. He picked up the phone and balanced it between his shoulder and cheek, leaving the side of his neck open for her assault. "Hello? -How did you get this number?" She continued kissing along his jaw, her hands roaming his chest as she sat straddle his lap. "I can't tonight. I just got married. Whatever it is, it can wait until monday." She sat back on his lap and put her hands in her lap, watching him with concern. "No, I know. I just-can't this wait? I'm on my honeymoon!" He protested. "You will not. I'll come in."

Joyce's eyebrows furrowed. "You're not going anywhere!" He reached beside them and set the phone back on the cradle.

"Baby I have to go to the lab."

"I swear to god Hopper if you leave me on our honeymoon!"

"Baby! Why don't you get some shopping in and I'll be back by tonight. And hopefully they'll leave me alone tomorrow."

"You don't have to go." "But baby I do. You don't understand. I have to do this protect you. To protect the boys."

She moved aside and let him stand up. "And we were just getting to the fun part." He pouted, leaning forward to kiss her. "Why don't you buy me some more of that sexy lingerie? I think some racy red will look good on you when I arrest you tonight."

## 15. Needy

It was midnight before Joyce heard the hotel room door click open and shut. She lay with her back to the door and she heard him undressing, muffling a cough in his shirt sleeve.

"Baby, you awake?" His warm hand caressed her shoulder but she pretended to be asleep, still angry at him for being gone all day. He settled in behind her, wrapping an arm around her middle and drawing her closer. "I know you're awake, and you're mad at me. And you have every right to be. I'm sorry."

She sighed and wiggled further against him. "I know you have to do what you have to do."

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The next morning after breakfast and getting dressed he lead her out to the street by the hand. He'd laid down the law that today he was going to buy something new and pretty for her.

"I hate shopping, Jim."

"Because you never buy anything for yourself. This is all about you today, sweetheart. No shopping for the boys. Just for you. I want you to pick out something you'd never buy for yourself."

As they walked through the town square he pulled her into an upscale sort of store. As he surveyed the place she took up a men's shirt and began eyeing him. "Not for me. For you." He chided.

She felt really underdressed in her grey sweater and black pencil skirt.

He turned her attention to the dresses and she turned over the tag on one. "Jim! This place is expensive!" She hissed, stressing the last word. He grabbed a random dress from the rack beside him. Red looked hot on her. Anything looked hot on her.

"Try on this one." He said, offering it to her.

"It's pretty but it's cut too low. And backless. I'm a mother, Hop."

"And my hot wife, Mrs. Hop. Just try it on, will ya?"

She rolled her eyes and traded it for the right size.

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The dress was dark red and knee length, backless. He knocked on the dressing room door, "Are you going to model it for me?"

"It's too racy."

"Let me see."

When she opened the door he didn't say a word. She crossed her arms over her cleavage impulsively, sure that he didn't like it.

"Give me the tags. I'll go pay for it." He said, biting his lip.

"This is too racy Jim! And too pricey!"

He moved his gaze from her long enough to look around for workers. When he found they were alone he slid into the room and clicked the door shut softly behind him.

She looked at him wide eyed as he closed the space between them. "Let me see the back of it." He whispered, turning her to face the wall. She could see the lust in his eyes in the reflection of the floor length mirror as he pressed his hips into her backside.

"Jim-" she breathed as he ground into her, gently pressing her against the wall. He bunched the material up around her waist and rubbed over the pantyhose and her panties, sending an electric current from her head to her toes.

"We're buying this dress, sweetheart. And you're going to wear it out of here." He whispered into her ear before pushing her hair aside and kissing her bare shoulder blade, his hips rolling into hers in a steady rhythm.

"Seriously, I could buy like four dresses at home for the price of this

one." She breathed, leaning back into his movements and biting back a moan.

"If you wear it back to the hotel, we'll get our money's worth out of it. Let Daddy buy this for you, sweetheart."

She covered her mouth with the back of her hand, concealing her laughter. "I thought we agreed this 'Daddy' thing was awkward."

"I'm kinda into it, actually." He admitted. "Let Daddy spoil you a little, Princess." He popped the tag from the dress and ending the discussion.

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He left her to put herself back together as he snuck off to the counter, presenting the tag to the pretty blonde behind the counter.

She caught up to him right after he'd paid and he quickly pocketed the receipt, passing her the bag to deposit her previous outfit in. She caught him winking at the sales lady, causing a brief spite of jealousy to flare up and in her. "Gotta spoil my lady a little." He grinned and Joyce rolled her eyes at him, reaching for his hand. He retrieved their shopping bag and followed her outside.

"Thank you, Daddy." She said lowly as he pulled her close to his side under his arm.

"You're welcome, sweetheart. And when we get home I'm taking you out and you're wearing it."

"The whole town will laugh at me."

"Correction, the whole town will be jealous of me. You look amazing in that dress, Joyce. I don't know what I have to do to prove to you that you're beautiful. I don't know how Lonnie programmed you to think so badly of yourself, but you've always been the sexiest woman I've known." He admitted, expressing the anger he felt over how badly Lonnie had emotionally beat her down over the years. Her grip tightened on the back of his henley.

He stopped her on the sidewalk and cupped her face in his hand,

turning her face to his. He kissed her deeply, all tongues and teeth until they both were out of breath and several passerby's wolf whistled. He smiled and reached for her hand.

"Let's go back to the hotel so I can show you just how beautiful you are to me. Again. And again. And again." He whispered and she blushed. "I love it when you do that." He laughed, taking her hand and leading her up the street towards the hotel.

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Back in their room he pulled her to him, hiking up her dress. His hands wandered her bare back. "I'm not kidding, you look amazing in this dress."

He started unbuckling his belt and she pushed his hands aside, doing it for him. "Let me take care of you, Daddy." She purred as she got down on her knees.

He growled obscenities under his breath as she pleased him, his hands tangled in her hair.

He picked her up and lay her across the bed, making quick work of tearing her pantyhose and panties, bunching up the material of her dress to her hips. "I need you, baby." He kissed her hungrily as he entered her, pressing her body into the mattress under him. "You're so goddamn beautiful." He mumbled as he gently bit down on the flesh where her neck met her shoulder as he moved in her. "And mine. All mine. Mrs. Joyce Lee Hopper."

Her nails raked his back as she moaned, riding out his motions languidly, the delicious burn in her belly almost unbearable. She stopped him and scooted to the edge of the bed, laying on her belly. He pulled her hips to him and entered her again, biting back a moan over the new angle. He fisted the material of the dress as he rolled his hips into her, his other hand traveling her spine. "Beautiful. Beautiful." He repeated his mantra as he moved, his hand moving around to circle her core.

They both reached the peak and fell together a heated mess on the bed, trying to regain their breath. "You know it's hard to believe," she

laughed, "it took an inter-dimensional monster to bring us together like this. I could've been having sex this good for years."

He laughed too and reached for a cigarette. "Yeah, we're pretty damn good at this sex thing." He emphasized by patting her knee.

"Do we really have to go back to our real lives tomorrow?" She asked, stealing his cigarette and taking a puff.

"Yep." He replied, moving to the bottom of the bed and grasping her thighs. "But I still have the rest of the night to prove to you how beautiful you are." She quickly snubbed the cigarette and gripped the sheets.



## 16. New Normal

(Including the Tumblr prompts: "I'd kill for a cup of coffee...literally" and I'm not going to be sympathetic until you see a doctor.")

After some fun in the shower, a warm breakfast, and dressing in their uniforms, Joyce and Hop loaded the police cruiser to make the journey back into Hawkins. Back to work, back to the boys, back to their real lives. Jim reached across the seat for her hand. "Besides it being really short, and me having to leave, how did you like our honeymoon?"

She squeezed his hand. "I loved it. And I love you."

He lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed the back of it. "I love you more, sweetheart."

She chuckled, looking out the window but still holding his hand. "I don't want to go back to work."

"Me either." He laughed.

He pulled up to the store and Joyce drew in a deep breath. "Back to the real world."

"Back to the real world." He echoed her sentiment. "Have a good day, baby."

She leaned across the cab and pushed his hat back to kiss him. "You too, baby."

He smiled at her as she slid from the truck, straightening her uniform before walking inside.

"I'm so lucky." He said aloud to the empty truck.

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Hopper didn't know who messed up, but someone had to answer for this. He slammed the cabinet closed, rummaging through several others. "Who let us run out of coffee?" He called over his shoulder.

The department fell silent, the men glancing at each other suspiciously. "I'd kill for a cup of coffee...literally." He growled, coming across a bag of decaf and tossing it back in the cabinet. "Callahan, you're first."

The younger man made a noise of protest and Hopper turned around, shooting him a death glare. His head was pounding with the lack of his morning caffeine. And, he hadn't exactly slept much the last few days. He strode across the room to his office and closed the door harder than he intended to.

He was sitting with his head in his hands when there was a light knock on his door. "What?" He growled, shifting through the mountain of paperwork on his desk.

Joyce walked in, still in her work uniform, carrying plastic grocery bags in her arms. "I heard you needed some backup?"

"Flo must've called you." He said with a half smile.

"Said she needed help saving the department from the wrath of Hopper." She smiled, passing him the bags. Inside was a can of coffee and a box of doughnuts. And a fresh pack of smokes.

"You're a godsend, Joyce." He replied, standing to face her.

"Have a better morning, Chief."

He framed her face with his hands and kissed her sweetly. "Now I can."

She glanced at her watch. "I gotta get back to work. I'm on my fifteen."

"Thank you, sweetheart." His hand wandered down to grab her ass.

"I'll see you tonight." She said lowly with a wink.

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Later that night Hop groaned and leaned over the kitchen table at Joyce's house. Her fingers wandered over the muscles of his

shoulders. "Now what did you do again?" She asked.

"Lower." He mumbled, his back so tense he could barely stand her touch. "I bent down to grab something and just felt this pull, and I haven't been able to stand up straight since. It hasn't hurt like this since I played football in high school." He hissed when she pressed into his lower back.

"And why didn't you go to the doctor?"

"It's just a catch. It'll ease up eventually."

"What if you really hurt it? I mean I'd like to think I have a healing touch, but I don't."

Tears welled up behind his eyes as she worked. "I'll ice it and I'll probably be fine by tomorrow."

"I'm not going to be sympathetic until you see a doctor." She warned. "You're the Chief. Not like you can take a few days off for bed rest."

"Not like you can take a few days off stay in bed with me." He said lowly so that the boys in the next room couldn't hear. "I could stand to spend a few days under you."

She popped the back of his head. "You're terrible, Jim Hopper. That's probably why your back's out now. Now, are you going to the emergency room willingly, or am I going to have to drag you?"

"I'm not going. I'll be fine tomorrow."

She pressed in on his lower back, making him yelp.

"You're going to the hospital, James Hopper."

## 17. Home

Joyce laughed on her way back to the truck. "The doctor thought you threw your back out playing sports!" She grabbed his love handle. "Like you play sports!"

Jim stopped short of the passenger side to lean down and kiss her, grimacing as he bent forward to cup her face. "This is all your fault woman."

"Not my fault you've been such an animal." She teased, nibbling his bottom lip. "You've got to take it easy for a few days."

He took her face with both hands then, kissing her again. "I don't know if I can keep my hands off of you that long."

"I can think of a thing or two to tide you over." She said with a touch of carnal promise, biting her lip and looking as innocently at him as possible.

"You're terrible." He suggested as he opened the passenger door for her.

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Jonathan met them at the truck, his face etched with worry. "Thank god! I thought something really bad had happened to you guys!"

Joyce sighed, angry at herself for worrying him. "I'm sorry baby, I meant to leave you a note. Jim threw his back out so I made him go to the hospital."

Jonathan sighed in relief that the situation was a lot less scary than he had imagined. "Dinner's on the table. We were just about to eat."

A very pregnant Nancy greeted the two of them when they got inside. She and Will sat side by side at the table. Jonathan took her seat next to her and Jim sat opposite them in his normal place while Joyce fixed their plates.

"What happened to your back?" Will asked and Joyce tried to conceal

her laughter. "I hurt my back playing football when I was in school. Sometimes it acts up." He answered nonchalantly, ignoring his wife's giggles. He knew she was still laughing about the sports thing.

Joyce placed his plate in front of him and sat down her own, taking her seat next to him. "So Nance, got any news for us?" She asked concerning the doctor visit Nancy had that day.

"Actually yes." She dug around in her purse and removed a ultrasound photo.

"Anyone wanna guess what it is?" Jonathan asked, reaching over to still her movements.

"Boy." Will chimed

"Girl!" Joyce grinned.

"A baby." Jim deadpanned and Joyce hit him lightly with the back of her hand. "What? I just want it to be a healthy baby either way."

Jonathan and Nancy looked at each other and counted down before shouting "BOY!" In unison.

Joyce shook her head. "We're still outnumbered, Nancy." She teased as Nancy passed her the ultrasound photo, which she looked over with Jim peering over her shoulder. The baby's head was well defined in the photo and his features, from the side, very clear. "He looks like Mommy." Joyce observed before she passed the photo to Will.

"You're gonna be an uncle, kid. How do you feel about that?" Jim asked Will as the young boy looked over the picture.

"I don't know how to feel about it yet." Will confessed.

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Joyce was carrying on with her after dinner chores, picking up misplaced things, when she noticed it. Jim sat on the couch, a newspaper spread out in front of him, and just over the top of the paper she caught a glimpse of the black rims.

"What are you wearing?" He lowered his paper, a look of confusion on his face. Then the realization washed over him.

"Oh, these old things?" He said, adjusting the glasses on his face. "I need them to read. The print's kinda small." He added, matter-of-factly.

He watched her as she pulled the newspaper from his hands and laid it on the couch next to him. She took its place, crawling into his lap and placing her arms around his middle.

"What's this about?"

She licked her lips in response. "I don't know. Just something about you in glasses."

He chuckled, subconsciously rearranging them again. "I didn't know poor eyesight could be sexy."

She laughed too and kissed him. "They just look really sexy on you, babe. You should wear them to bed sometime."

"I don't need glasses to read you." He grinned and she laughed heartily, play swiping at his chest.

"You're full of it, Jim Hopper!"

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In the bathroom Joyce slid into her nightgown and stared disapprovingly at her underwear in her reflection. This talk of the baby had her mind whirring. Today marks a week ago she should have begun her period. A whole week. She'd been thankful it hadn't showed up on their honeymoon but now she was growing anxious. She couldn't handle another baby right now. Especially not with Nancy being pregnant. What if her first grand baby arrived several months before she gave birth herself? How crazy would that be? And she knows Jim doesn't want more kids. How will he feel about this? How will she tell him?

Joyce sighed and wrapped her arms around herself. Sleep on it. She decided to sleep on it before she told anyone. Tomorrow she'd do

something about situation.

## 18. Worries

Karen sat across the diner table from Joyce, who sat with her head in her hands. "Does he know about the baby?" Joyce looked up at her with so much distress that Karen reached across the table for her hands.

"I don't know if there's a baby. We've been so careful, Karen! Pills and condoms, every time! I'm too old to be starting over!"

"Have you taken a test yet?"

"I was trying to decide if I should tell him first or not. I feel like he deserves to know first."

"Buy some tests and go home to him. He should support you through this." Karen offered. "It's what I'd do."

"He's going to be so angry. He doesn't want anymore kids."

"If he's a real man, he'll just have to accept it."

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Hopper motioned for her to sit, eyeing the paper bag she clutched so tightly. "Sweetheart, what's wrong?" He sat next to her on the couch, their knees touching, and he reached for her hand.

"I'm so sorry, Hop." She's angry at her inability to keep her hands from shaking. "I'm just so worried, I'm a week late."

He tensed immediately. "You mean-?"

"I know we've been so careful, and I don't want this anymore than you do. I'm too old to start over. I can't handle a baby right now! What if I'm pregnant and my grand baby is born before I have another baby?"

He pulled her hands in his lap. "Are those tests?"

"Yes."



"Well let's get to it. You know, before we start freaking out too hard. Let's see what we're dealing with here, okay?"

She threw herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "What if it's positive? What will we do?"

He kissed the top of her head, wrapping his arms tightly around her. "We're in this together, honey. But you gotta take the tests so we know what we're dealing with."

He lead her to the bedroom with a hand on the small of her back. He sat on the edge of the bed closest to the bathroom door. "I'll be right here."

She disappeared into the bathroom with a click of the door and he held his breath. He wouldn't allow himself to feel anything until they read the tests.

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"What does it say? He asked impatiently when she opened the door. / div

"It-it's positive, Jim."

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Take the other one, sweetheart. Let's be sure."

She slipped quietly back into the bathroom and he sat with the positive test in his hands. Positive. A baby. Fatherhood. Again. Something he never wanted to think about again. What if it was another girl? How could he move on and be there for another little girl? How could he possibly be a father again without betraying Sarah?

Joyce looked defeated when she opened the door again. "Positive?" He asked.

"Negative. What does this mean, Jim? I'm so confused!" He pulled her into his lap and rested his chin on top of her head.

"This means you need to see a doctor, asap." He said, threading his

fingers through hers. "I'm hoping that getting two different answers means we're not pregnant."

"Maybe I'm just starting menopause early." She offered, silently hoping.

"That's always a possibility."

.

Joyce was uncharacteristically quiet over dinner and both boys shot glances between her and Jim. He took her hand in his.

"Mom, is there something going on?" Jonathan asked, finally breaking the silence.

"Just not feeling very well today honey." She commented. She was as white as a sheet, and not eating. Jim kissed the back of her hand.

"Why don't you lay down sweetheart? I'll put up some leftovers in case your hungry later." She nodded and pushed back from the table. "I'll be with you in a few."

After dinner the boys volunteered to do the dishes and Jim padded his way down the hall and into their room. He heard the sniffles, as he suspected he would, and slipped out of his jeans and shirt to slide into bed with her. He pulled her shaking form close to his chest and wrapped his arm around her protectively. "You're going to worry yourself to death, honey. Either you are, or you aren't. And if you are, and don't want to go through with it, there's things that can be done about it. No pressure either way from me, this is all what you want. I'm here every step. This isn't the end of the world, sweetheart." She sniffled and shuddered against him and he kissed behind her ear. "This isn't a punishment for being happy, I promise."

She turned in his embrace and buried her face in his neck, her face wet with tears.

## 19. Family

For some reason, Jim sitting next to her in his uniform in the doctor's office made her nervous. He held her hand tightly and watched her whenever he thought she wasn't looking. When she did look at him he squeezed her hand and bit his bottom lip nervously. Even in the stressful situation she felt compelled to kiss him. So she did, to help still both of their nervousness.

They both jumped when the door clicked open. The doctor was stone faced, not giving the couple a feeling in one direction or the other.

It seemed as if he took forever to pull up a stool. "So I have your test results." Jim's hand tightened on hers. "I'm sorry your pregnancy test is negative and it seems like you may be starting menopause."

Joyce sighed in relief and leaned into Jim's shoulder. Her relief spilled over into tears and Jim patted her hair thoughtfully, leaning forward to kiss her tears away.

"Thank you." She managed to squeak out to the doctor. He nodded solemnly before standing. "I wish you the best." He commented before heading for the door.

"Part of me wanted it, you know. To keep and grow a little piece of you. To make something with you. But I don't want another baby. I can't have another baby."

He climbed onto the examination table beside her and pulled her into his chest. "We're making plenty together, baby. And Jonathan and Will aren't mine by blood, but they're certainly my boys." He smoothed her hair with a big hand. "Besides. The new baby will be here any day now. We're going to be grandparents, baby."

Her sobbing intensified. "I'm too young to be a grandmother!" He laughed gently. "This doesn't mean your old. Just means your baby is having a baby. And he's going to be a great Daddy. And you're going to be the best grandma ever."

When her tears subsided he took her by the hand and lead her out to

the truck. "What do you want your grandma name to be, anyway?" He asked.

"What?" "You know-" he commented. "Grandma, Gma, Granny, Nanna, Meemaw. What do you want the kid to call you when it gets older?"

She shrugged. "I haven't given it much thought. I called my grandparents grandma and granddaddy, but they were ancient." She laughed, remembering her mother's parents fondly.

"My Dad's parents were Nanny and Pop Pop. My Mom's were Meemaw and Pawpaw. So I think I wanna be Pawpaw." He said proudly with a smile.

"Has a nice ring to it." She said. "But all the grandma names just sound so old."

"What about Jojo?" He asked. "Pawpaw and Jojo." She took his hand across the seat, her eyes filled with unshed tears again. "Sounds wonderful, Pawpaw."

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Over the course of the next few weeks Will and Jonathan made the first legal move of their lives. It was Will's idea, but Jonathan was the one to put it into motion. Neither wanted to carry on with their non-existent father's last name. Jim teared up when the boys asked his permission to follow their Mom's lead and take his name. When Jonathan mentioned he wanted to do it because he wanted his son to be a Hopper, Jim left the room completely. Joyce smiled and took her eldest's hand, reassuring him that Jim was overjoyed at the idea. Joyce found the big man sitting at the foot of their bed, openly crying. After much coaxing he slid into bed with her and cried until he felt raw. He had lost Sarah. Diane had remarried. He had no siblings. He had just assumed his name would die with him. Now his entire new family was ready to adopt him and take his last name. And the new baby, he would carry on the Hopper name.

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Weeks later Jim and Joyce stood in the kitchen after their shifts. It had been a particularly rough shift for both of them and they stood in mutual relief, just enjoying the closeness and warmth of the other. Joyce leaned against his broad chest backing him against the bar, her arms around his middle and her head against his chest. He stroked her hair idly, other hand smoothing her back. They both tensed at the sound of the phone.

Jonathan raced to it before either of them could move. He'd been on edge for days now. He rounded the corner after a few minutes, phone clutched to his ear. "It's time! We gotta go!"

Jim picked a leather couch in the waiting room and pulled Joyce into his lap, grabbing her nervous hands with his and stilling them. Will slumped into the couch at Joyce's feet. "Everything's going to be fine." Jim whispered into her hair. "A beautiful little boy is about to be born, and we're going to spoil him rotten. And I know he'll be your nephew, Will, but you'll be able to teach him stuff like a big brother."

"My brother's about to be a Dad." Will said forlornly.

"It's a pretty rewarding job." Jim said, flashing the kid a half grin that he hoped was as sincere as he felt.

They greeted Ted and Karen as they rushed into the waiting room, Karen immediately heading into the back to be with Nancy.

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Jim was fast asleep, his head thrown back into the couch cushions. Will slept soundly as well, tucked under Jim's arm and into the man's side. Joyce fidgeted in his lap, flipping through the same magazine for the last twenty minutes. He wished she too could sleep so soundly, but it had been five hours and still no baby.

The doors to the room flung open, startling the three of them. "Baby's here!" Jonathan breathed. Joyce met him at the door and he sank into her arms, a broad grin plastered across his handsome face. "Eight and a half pounds. Twenty inches."

Jim lay a hand on the back of the younger man's neck and pulled him

in for a tight hug. "Welcome to the Dad club, kid."

Ted offered Jonathan a hand, congratulating him over a handshake.

When Will looked up at him with big owl eyes, Jonathan went down to one knee and hugged his little brother tightly. "You're an uncle now, big guy."

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Nancy was exhausted, but she smiled brightly at Joyce and Jim. Joyce took her hand immediately. "I'm so proud of you! You did so well!" Jim stepped over to the cradle in the corner of the room. The beautiful little boy lay sleeping, his little hands in fists at his face. Jim reached for Joyce and pulled her into his side to look at the tiny wonder.

"Nancy, Jonathan, he's beautiful!" Joyce gushed, holding her husband's hand.

Jim reached in to smooth a finger against the baby's thin golden hair. "He looks like Daddy." He commented.